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MAY 1, 1926

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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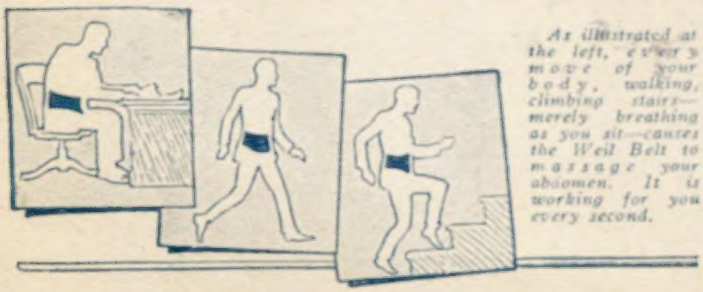

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ROBERT SIMPSON, EDITOR

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Around the Corner

AROUND MYSTERY MAGAZINE'S next corner—the May 1 issue—we are confronted with the promise of several truly startling features that would be startling under any circumstances in any magazine. Apropos of one of these features—it is nothing unusual to hear a man sing and play his own accompaniment. But it is considered rather astonishing for a famous illustrator of magazine stories to undertake the job of writing a story of his own. There is one famous illustrator, however, who does not care how astonishing it is. He's done it. And the title of the story, significantly enough, is—"Bringing Home the Bacon."

It is a two part story and the author is EVERETT SHINN.

Furthermore, it is a story that, in its strictly modern way, expresses most emphatically that there is nothing much more mysterious than the mind of the modern young man.

Then, around this same corner, we find DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS and MARY PICKFORD telling a true mystery story. Doug tells the story and Mary shivers an accompaniment, while Bide Dudley writes the scenario, omitting not a single thrill.

After which we trail "The Stormy Petrel" by Elliot Balestier up to a remote New England village where things that have no business to happen "come off" with the kind of simplicity that is almost blasé.

Several powerful short stories by Ben Lucien Burman, Josephine Bentham, Charles Lawrence Edholm and others round out a number that, for variety of interest and weight of story value, will be mighty hard to improve upon.

Statement of ownership, management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of MYSTERY MAGAZINE published semi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1926. State of New York, County of New York:—Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Louis F. Wilzin, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Publisher of the MYSTERY MAGAZINE, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, and business manager are: Publisher—Louis F. Wilzin, 1133 Broadway, New York, N. Y. Editor—Robert Simpson, 1133 Broadway, New York, N. Y. Managing Editor—None. Business Manager—None.

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3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona-fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds or other securities than as so stated by him.

LOUIS F. WILZIN, Publisher.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 17th day of March, 1926. Florence Epstein, Notary Public, Kings County. (My Commission expires March 31, 1927.)

The Girl on the Staircase

By RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

A NOVELETTE

I

SO OLD a friend as Rossiter should have known Waring better than to have mentioned the fact, surprising as it was—surprising, that is, in Waring's case. With any other man, it would have seemed usual and human enough. Particularly as, old friends though they were, they had not seen each other for three or four years.

Remembering, too, Waring's intensely reticent nature, reticent, that is, as it had suddenly developed some ten years or so before. Previous to that, he had been the most companionable of men.

About that time, however, a certain tragic circumstance in his life had transformed him into something like a fanatical recluse, and Rossiter had been almost the only friend he had cared to retain of a wide and genial circle.

Having sufficient means of his own, he had thrown up his promising practice as a fashionable young surgeon and had suddenly disappeared from London.

Since then he had been caught sight of there only at rare intervals, a bronzed and solitary looking apparition, returned from wanderings Heaven knew where, soon to vanish again into the blue. So had he acquired his nickname of "Waring," after Browning's poem, and that name will suffice for this narrative.

For the past two years he had been settled in New York, and had strangely enough chosen his abode where, indeed, he was little likely to be troubled with visitors; at the top of a crazy old building in the network of streets in the neighborhood of the Battery.

He had chosen it for its seclusion, for its nearness to the sea, and for the view he got of old roofs and narrow winding streets, reminiscent to him of that European world he had forever left behind.

The building was occupied by marine instrument dealers, chart-makers, a solitary artist in tobacco pipes and quaint walking-sticks, and various nondescript businesses of a quiet nature. The wooden staircase was dark and rickety, and he had the spacious top floor to himself. His rooms were a curious contrast to his surroundings, but of them I will speak presently.

AFTER mounting six creaking flights, the surprise Rossiter had encountered was merely this. Emerging at length on Waring's landing, he had almost collided with a young woman who appeared to be leaving Waring's door.

Dingy at all times of the day, the landing was then, at the end of an October afternoon, so plunged in twilight that she was little more than a shadowy figure to him; a rustle of skirts, and a delicate perfume.

Moreover, she passed him so quickly with an evident wish to conceal her face, that a glimmering of girlish beauty, flashing softly by him and gone almost before he was aware of her presence, was his whole impression.

A young and beautiful woman. That was all; yet on those dingy stairs, she was something of an apparition. And at Waring's door! This was the real surprise, to one who knew Waring and his story; and, knowing it as Rossiter did, the surprise was of good omen, one to make him happy for his friend.

"So he got over it at last!" was his involuntary thought, as, finally discovering Waring's name in the dim light, he raised a small bronze knocker of Japanese workmanship, which he recognized from Waring's old chambers in Gray's Inn.

And, when the door opened, and his friend stood before him, he gave a cry of surprise.

"Great Scott! How on earth did you manage to bring Gray's Inn across the sea?"

At a glance, he saw that the spacious low-ceilinged, black-beamed room was a replica of the old room in London, where he and his friend had so often sat smoking and exchanging their dreams, far into the small hours.

"A fancy of mine," said Waring, "but come in. How good, and strange, to see you again!"

Waring's lean, strongly-knit, athletic figure was over the common height. He must have been six feet two or three, and his firm bronzed face was of a marked Celtic type. Highland Scot, one would have guessed.

At once powerful and sensitive, he had large deep-set eyes, heavily lidded, and startlingly light gray in color, vividly cold like a mountain spring, and yet wistful, under a shock of black hair oddly streaked with white. A close-trimmed mustache, similarly brindled, accentuated the well-cut curves of a mouth in which a lurking humor seemed to keep watch on the over-earnestness of a passionate nature.

It was a strong face in a dream; the face of a soldier who might be a poet as well; and it was full of a rather haughty loneliness. One felt in looking at Waring that he rather condescended to live than lived, that, so to speak, he leaned down from another plane—the fourth dimension—as he talked with one, not with any suggestion of superiority.

For, with all, he was a most human companion, but as though his habitual existence was in another element, his interests and activities in a world that lay behind his strong sad eyes rather than in front of them.

The first salutation over, and after the two friends had filled in the gap of each other's history since their last meeting, Rossiter playfully ventured to hope that, judging by a certain charming observation he had made immediately previous to raising his friend's knocker, he was in a happier frame of mind than he had been three years ago.

But Waring looked at him in plain bewilderment.

"What are you talking about?" he asked.

"Oh, it's all right. Forgive me if I put my foot in it, old chap," said the other apologetically. "I had no intention to be inquisitive. Let us say no more about it. But I'm glad, all the same."

"Glad for what? What *do* you mean? Why all this mystery?

"Really, I'm sorry I spoke. Let us forget it."

"But you must tell me. What on earth are you driving at? I assure you I haven't the least idea."

Rossiter smiled in a knowing way and shook his head.

"It's all right, old chap, it's all right; I quite understand."

But here Waring rapped out an oath.

"You d——d fool!" he said. "Why can't you explain yourself?"

"Oh, all right, then," said Rossiter, "but it is strange you should want an explanation of what you must know so much better than I."

And then he told of his encounter with that glimmer of girlish beauty, that rustle of skirts, that delicate perfume.

As he spoke, Waring's form grew tense, and his eyes seemed like pools of blue fire in the twilight of the sombre wainscoted room. It was long before he spoke, as though mute with astonishment and anger.

"Me!" he cried at length. "Me! A *woman!* How dare you?"

II

ROSSITER was fairly dumbfounded at his friend's outburst, and protested inarticulate regrets. He was awfully sorry, had meant nothing offensive, *et cetera, et cetera.*

"But you, of all men, Edward!" Waring continued, the anger in his voice changing to pain.

Then he rose from his chair, and, crossing the room, pressed a button in the wall. Soft lights sprang out of the dark woodwork, and going over to a great writing table, on which lay open several large antique folios, which he had evidently been studying when Rossiter found him, and which certainly did not suggest gallantry, he detached from the wall a small picture. He brought it over to his friend.

"Have you forgotten that face, Edward?" he said.

It was the nobly beautiful face of a girl, but just a woman: a beauty rare and strange such as seldom is seen upon the earth; a face that well might haunt a man forever.

"Indeed I have not forgotten her," said Rossiter, tenderly taking the portrait from his friend's hand, and looking long at the face.

"Indeed, I have not forgotten," he repeated, handing it back, "but I thought, well—— We cannot go on living in the past forever, Geoffrey."

"Why not?" asked his friend, sinking down into his chair, with the portrait on his knee. "Suppose some of us have nowhere else to live; *can* live nowhere else; want to live nowhere else."

His friend made no answer.

"And suppose it is possible to live there; possible to make the so-called dead past live again!"

For response Rossiter rose and laid his hands on his friend's shoulder.

"I am sorry from my heart, old chap," he said. "I wouldn't have hurt you like that for the world. You know what I too thought of her; how sacred it all was to me. Forgive me for talking like a profane fool. You will forgive me, wont you?"

"Why, of course," Waring answered, warmly taking his friend's hand and returning to his usual calm self as suddenly as he had flashed out of it. "Let us say no more about it," and, rising from the chair, he crossed the room and replaced the portrait on the wall.

"Now," he said, coming back to his friend, "you're going to have some dinner with me. Oh yes, you are. I've got an excellent cook; a wonderful old Celestial who looks after me like a mother."

He pressed a button on his desk, and presently a deep-alcoved door opened, and a withered little Chinaman appeared and advanced softly.

"This is Mr. Rossiter, Fu-Wang," he said. "He is going to take dinner with me."

The little Chinaman gave a smiling nod, chirrupped something, and retired. Presently they were seated at a delicately served dinner, in a charming little room, which was once more an exact replica of the little room where they had dined so often years before in London; the same Chippendale furniture, the same Whistler etchings on the walls, the same rare blue china.

And outside, through the quaint garret windows, there was the same murmur of a city that might have been London, and lights on a broad river that might have been the Thames.

"An original idea, this of yours, you luxurious fellow," said Rossiter. "I can hardly believe we are not back in old Gray's Inn. It's as though we had taken passage in Wells' 'Time Machine!' "

"My very idea! You spoke of living in the past. This is a corner of it reconstructed," said Waring, adding a moment afterward, as though to himself, "just a beginning."

"It's a happy idea," said his friend, "but, isn't it just a little sad, too?"

"Of course," answered Waring with a charming boyish smile, as though there was matter for mirth in the very idea. "What do you expect of life? Surely not happiness!"

"That's true enough!" Rossiter vaguely assented, looking wonderingly at his friend.

III

AS finally toward midnight Waring let Rossiter out onto his dark landing, having exacted a promise of another visit before long, he surprised him by a sudden question; and it seemed to him that Waring's face was curiously serious and even eager as he asked it.

"You say it was here you saw her?" he asked.

"Oh yes!" answered Rossiter hurriedly, not wishing to resume the painful subject. "She was probably looking for some office, and had been reading the name on the door."

"She was close to the door?"

"Just coming away."

"You didn't see her face?"

"Only a passing glimpse—a glimpse of a pretty girl—generalized, so to speak," Rossiter laughed, hastening to descend the stairs, and calling up a final goodnight.

"Very strange!" he heard Waring say to himself as he closed the door. But what there was strange about it, assuming his friend to have told the truth, which he did not for a moment doubt, he could not for the life of him see.

AFTER his friend had gone, Waring sat over his desk far into the night, the circle on his lamp-light falling on the yellow pages of a curious old Latin treatise on "The Souls of Flowers."

Other ponderous old volumes, folios and quartos, bound in ribbed vellum or massive leather, bore the name of such well-known dreamers and mystics as Paracelsus, Van Helmont, Robertus de Fluctibus, men whose strange speculations had blazed the trail for modern materialistic science, and suggested vistas of a still stranger science beyond.

On the shelves which covered most of the room from floor to ceiling might have been found many more volumes of such strange learning, from Pythagoras and Iamblichus to Psellus and Eliphas Levi. There were also on his desk several recently published books with such titles

as "The Transformation of Living Tissues," and "The Immateriality of Matter."

Waring, as I said, had, in the life which he had deliberately put behind him, won distinction as a surgeon. And for a year or two he had explored what one might call its mystical side under Charcot in Paris.

Incongruously side by side with all this weird old learning lay a sheaf of faded letters in a pretty flower-like handwriting. To these Waring presently turned, unfolding them one by one, and selecting several of these, he applied himself to them with the same severe application which he had just been giving to the crabbed Latin of his old author.

One would scarcely have guessed that here was a lover rereading the heart-breaking records of ten years ago. He leaned over them rather with the searching scrutiny of a man of science, bent on wresting from them some secret, hidden beneath the tender words.

Slowly, word by word he read them, with an intense absorption, as though he would evoke from the faded ink and yellowing paper the very warmth and wonder of the moment when they were written, the very fragance of the bosom that had once leaned over them, the beating of the heart within, the very innermost meaning of the soul that had there poured itself out upon the page.

For a long while he was thus engaged, so still and absorbed, that an onlooker might have deemed him sleeping and yet awake, in a kind of trance.

At last, he roused himself, with a sigh, and methodically replaced the letters in their several envelopes, tying them with a silk ribbon that still exhaled a faint faraway fragrance.

Then he sat a while holding the packet in his hand, with closed eyes, as one praying, and, at length, he quietly arose, locked the packet in a drawer of his desk, snapped off the lights, and went to his bedroom.

As he fell asleep, the chimes of old Trinity came faintly to his ears, striking two o'clock. A little while after, in the stillness, something luminous and strangely fragrant bent over him, like a rosy cloud, and a face leaned out of it and softly kissed him on the brow.

Had Rossiter been there, he might have recognized the fragrance.

IV

MOST human lives have no special character, no individual direction. Their events are minor accidents and commonplace happenings, and they begin and end with no significance to distinguish one from the other.

They are little more than a series of meals throughout a number of years. Such activities and emotions as belong to them are fragmentary and lukewarm; leave no mark; and contribute to no general end.

The dramatic contrast, therefore, is the more startling of those rare lives lived with so rapt an intensity in one lifelong dream, or in the tranced pursuit of one purpose; lives which thus attain the unity of a work of art, and the value of an inspiring symbol. Such a life was Waring's.

You could not look at him and doubt that he had been born for something more than the common lot. Such highly individualized characters attract destiny. Yet his life in its early years had been much as other lives of his class and profession.

It was his meeting with Helen Tower in his thirty-first year that had so significantly transformed his existence. But perhaps the influence of that event upon both their lives was due no less to the circumstances

of their meeting than the meeting itself.

Even the lives of commonplace men are influenced, to some degree, by their meeting with the commonplace woman.

But when the rare man meets the rare woman, particularly as Waring met Helen Tower, the rare event must follow.

Had Geoffrey Waring and Helen Tower been free to marry each other, their lives would, doubtless, have developed beautifully and tranquilly side by side in the harmony of that happiness, which, proverbially, has no history.

But they were not free, and the anguish of the loss they were thus called on to suffer was like a furnace in which their souls were moulten together and made one forever.

Up till that moment, women had meant little to Waring's life. An enthusiastic ambition for his profession had largely taken their place, and it was the tragic irony of his fate that the only woman he had instantly worshiped and was to love for the rest of his days should suddenly be revealed to him like an apparition out of the air. It was at the moment when he had irrevocably bound himself to another; a conventional engagement, into which he had allowed himself to drift, to a pretty devoted child, whose pathetic little being, as he knew too well, lay in the hollow of his hand—his to bless or break.

There was but a week to their marriage when, one evening, at a friend's studio, he met the beautiful American girl, of whose beauty and gifts as a painter all London was talking.

It was one of those meetings, so instant and complete in their profound and intense *rapport*, so vivid with recognition and understanding, that it seems impossible to account for them without using expressions that smack of the mystical cant of lovers.

Yet, on what other ground than those of some deep spiritual mystery are we to explain the swift, unerring sense of absolute union; the strange immediate certainty of belonging to each other, and of always having belonged to each other; which, as of some mysterious harmony of atoms, does sometimes overcome a man and a woman, until that moment completely unknown to each other; and thus coming together apparently for the first time from the opposite ends of the earth.

No words are needed. Their eyes have but to meet for their lives to combine in an instantaneous flash of glory. Such meetings are in themselves so strange that no theories need seem too strange to account for them.

They bear, sometimes even to sympathetic onlookers, such evident marks of recognition, as of reunions rather than introductions, that it is not to be wondered at if some have dreamed that such lovers have already been each other's in lives previous to this, and shall be lovers still in lives to follow after.

In an existence which is all a dream, no dream is too strange to be true; and those friends who had been in the room with Geoffrey Waring and Helen Tower, that fateful evening, were accustomed afterward to say that such, even to them, had seemed their meeting.

"Look! There are two who are born for each other. Poor souls!"—a certain cynic was heard to remark; even he momentarily suffused and softened with their radiance.

THAT this was their own divine and desperate belief need not be said. Nor can it reasonably be dismissed as a lover's fancy when one realizes that,

more than ten years after, that moment still remained, with ever increasing poignancy, the meaning of Waring's life.

That moment, and the wild and blest tragic hours spent together, before the day came when they voluntarily gave up their own lives that another might live.

Sometimes in the years that followed it had seemed almost incredible to Waring himself that one week out of a long life should have so pervasive a power as to dominate and obliterate all the rest.

But there are experiences like intensely distilled attars, or fearfully concentrated explosives, a mere grain of which can perfume a whole palace, or destroy a fortress.

Within a year of their meeting death had made Waring free. But before he could reach her side, death had taken Helen, too, and his life crashed in ruins. All that he cared to rescue was that portrait and that bundle of letters.

It was long before he came to himself. A wanderer, as we have seen, in this land and that, living a curious somnambulistic existence, from which occasionally he half awoke, to find himself, with a certain sad amusement, hunting elephants in Africa, or leading a charge in the obscure warfare of some South American republic, or fasting in India and studying its mystic lore with learned yogis.

These and other experiments in forgetfulness he had tried, but the attar of those far-off hours still perfumed for him the spaces of the sea and the solitudes of the hills.

It was vain to seek other meanings for his life. One day, with a sudden feeling of illumination, he came to understand, that it was never intended to have any other meaning. And with that thought came others.

Suddenly his life righted itself. The confusions of his sorrow rolled away from his soul like obscuring mists. All these months he had been walking in a vain show. If Helen had been the meaning of his life, she was still its meaning. Henceforth she should be its purpose.

His Helen was safe with him in the Universe. It was impossible for them to lose each other. He had but to seek her, and he must find. There were ways known to the soul, and powers latent in the tireless will of Love, beyond the dreams of magic.

"Love is stronger than Death" had once seemed to him but a phrase of lover's rhetoric. Now he came to understand it as a truth of a spiritual science in which he had but to perfect himself to prove it true.

It was not by his own dying, as the common thought was, that he might find Helen again, but by a tremendous art of living, through which that which momentarily divided them, whatever it was, would be dissipated, and their immortal essences know each other once more.

In such speculations, which had for him at once the power of certitudes, he felt that he had found the clue to that ethereal labyrinth wherein for a while her lovely face was hidden from his eyes, and, holding firmly to it, from that day on, he advanced with a high heart.

He never doubted that the moment would arrive, when, once more as in that London studio, she would flower suddenly out of the air, as the moon steps from her cave of cloud.

V

MORE than a year had gone by without Rossiter having seen Waring again.

In the interval he had received an affectionate word from him announcing his intention of burying himself alive, as he said, to pursue certain

studies, in a mountain wilderness where he owned a broad stretch of the primeval chaos. He would let him know when he returned.

So, in due course, Rossiter received a card inviting him to dine.

Once more Fu-Wang silently waited upon them in the room with the whistlers and the blue china, and all the London memories.

"But you will have to eat the whole of Fu-Wang's dinner," said Waring, "for I have been limiting myself to rice for a long while, not entirely to Fu-Wang's approval. Some experiments I have been trying out, about which, by the way, I want to consult you afterward."

So, while Rossiter ate heartily after the manner of this world, Waring delicately manipulated his chopsticks and drank ice water. When the meal was over, and they had retired to the room of the mysterious folios and the Beautiful Face and sat a while quietly smoking, Waring began.

"I am going to ask your patient hearing, Edward," he said, " for what must seem to you uncommonly like moonshine and mid-summer madness combined. But you are the only friend I have left—or care to have left. Besides, you have quite a little moonshine and mid-summer madness Enough, I know, to understand and sympathize, and enough of the more solid virtues of common sense to make a reliable witness.

"I've been so much alone now, for so long—not a human face have I seen but Fu-Wang's, if you can call it human—and I have had, or thought I had, such uncommon experiences, that I am anxious to have an outside opinion.

"My studies have been of a kind that often end in madness—so-called, at all events—and it may be that I am mad already without knowing it. I am going to ask you to be the judge. If you think I need medical treatment, and a strait-jacket, I give you a free hand. Is that understood?"

"Perfectly," nodded Rossiter, who had not failed to notice an increased sensitiveness in the bronzed face of his friend, even a touch of ascetic fragility refining on its strength, a quality indeed pervading it for which he had no other description but luminosity.

It seemed to shine with the intensity of an inner radiance, and the old line about o'er-informing this tenement of clay crossed his mind.

His general impression was that of a man who had been living a long while in moonlight. And it was not without a little friendly concern that Rossiter made the observation.

"Well, I think, after all," continued Waring, "I'll begin by illustrating my remarks and making them after, as an Irishman might put it. Can you sit quite still, without a word, for half an hour, or perhaps more? Here are the cigarettes, and here comes Fu-Wang with the whisky. Help yourself. I mustn't take any. Comfortable chair? Very good. Then we'll begin. But wait a minute. I'll put out a light or two. Too much light is not advisable. This lamp will be enough."

Then the two friends sank back into their armchairs, the soft haze of a large reading-lamp illuminating the space between them, the rest of the big room in darkness.

Waring had first taken a small seashell from his pocket, of silvery mother-of-pearl. This he held in his hand resting easily upon his knee, and, fixing his eyes upon it, continued to gaze at it for some minutes. After a while, he seemed to have forgotten it, and was breathing softly as if asleep, though his eyes were still open.

VI

WHEN half an hour or so had gone by, he suddenly spoke, without changing his position or moving his eyes. He spoke rather like a sleep-walker.

"Do you see anything?" he said.

"I see a tiny mist shaping between us," said Rossiter.

"Go on watching, and tell me if you see anything else."

After a short time, Rossiter spoke:

"It seems to be taking the form of a rose, very faint, like a silver-point."

"Go on watching."

"There is color coming into it. Yes! It is pink now."

"Go on watching."

"It is growing redder."

"See if you can touch it."

Rossiter stretched out his hand.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed. "It feels like thistle-down."

"Go on watching."

And as the silent watching went on, the rose grew stronger and stronger, as though life was pouring into it by unseen channels.

"Take it in your hand."

And, as it floated waveringly before him, Rossiter drew it out of the air gently. As he did so, there trailed behind it a faint thread as of gossamer, stretching between it and Waring's fingers.

"Is it a real rose?" asked Waring dreamily.

"It is a real rose."

"You are sure. Make quite sure."

"I am as sure as I am sure of this chair."

"Has it any smell?"

Rossiter put the phantom rose to his nostrils.

"No, it hasn't any smell."

"All right. Go on watching it."

After a while, Rossiter spoke again:

"It is beginning to fade."

"Very well. Go on watching."

Little by little, the rose went on fading, till there was little left of it but a silver shadow. Then Rossiter looked up curiously at his friend. His face was very tense and deathly white. Then he looked down again for the rose, but it had vanished.

"It is gone!" he exclaimed.

"All right," said Waring. "Can you stand a little more?"

"Certainly."

"Watch again, then."

This time Rossiter had not so long to wait. Presently out of the darkness there flitted a tiny white shape with such suddenness that he gave a start.

"What is the matter?"

"I believe it is a butterfly."

"All right. Watch a little longer."

The butterfly, after the manner of its kind, was fluttering about the lamp. And presently there was another fluttering there, and still another.

"There are more of them, and they seem to grow larger."

"Good. See if you can catch one. Make sure that they are real."

Rossiter rose from his chair and made a dash after one of the flitting ghostly things. But it eluded him. However, he presently succeeded, and could feel the strange little creature fluttering in the prison of his fist, with tiny throbbing heart.

As he tried to look at it, it escaped, leaving behind it the soft down of its wings.

"Are you satisfied that they are real butterflies?"

"I am."

"And that it was a real rose?"

"I am."

"All right. Now I will let them go back home again," said Waring, with a queer dreamy laugh. "Quite a little longer," he added faintly.

Then the flittering shapes grew thinner and fainter, just as the rose had faded, till the lamplight shone through them, and at length they

faded away like curling cigarette smoke into the air.

"Now, if you please, I'll join you with a little whisky and soda," said Waring, suddenly rousing himself and sitting up; "the smallest drop in the world. Thank you!"

Then, lighting a cigarette, he turned eagerly to his friend.

"So I am not mad, eh, Edward?"

"Of course, you are not! But it's rather a dangerous business, isn't it?"

"I'll tell you. You've had the illustrations. Now for the remarks. Of course, you have probably seen this kind of thing before. The phenomenon of materialization is as old, and doubtless older, than Egypt. We all know that it can be done; that it is not, as vulgar sceptics declare, all trickery. You may have seen it in India, as I have. Gift or art, or both, it exists. It can be done. But what interests me is that I can do it. You have attested it. I am not mad. You have seen.

"The rose, you say, was real; the butterflies were real. Oh, my dear friend, what this means to me! Have you the beginning of an idea of what it means, a glimpse of my terrible, wonderful dream? Dare I tell you of it? I must, for I may die in fulfilling it. Do you think it is butterflies I would make—or a rose?

"Yet if I can create those out of nothing, by the power of my thought —Ah, Edward, why may I not create? —But you will swear to keep this a sacred secret between us. Perhaps some day I'll give you leave to speak."

For answer Rossiter stretched out his hand.

"You know me, Geoffrey."

"Will you swear?"

"I swear," and Rossiter looked around. "I swear by yonder face, Geoffrey. Is that enough?"

Waring pressed the outstretched hand of his friend.

"But you have nothing to say?" Geoffrey asked presently.

"I think you are very unhappy, dear friend." Rossiter answered at length, "and I am sorry for you from my heart. And you will admit that what you have been saying, what I have even to admit seeing, is hard to believe. Indeed I can hardly believe that I have heard and seen it. My moonshine, as you call it, is limited. What am I to say?"

Say nothing. But keep close to me in your thoughts."

"That goes without saying. But that is very little. I wish I could persuade you——"

He left the sentence unfinished, as he looked at Waring's face.

"No use?" he added.

"No use!"

"All right, then. I know there are more things in heaven and earth and so on. But you know that other phrase of the same melancholic Prince ——'that way madness lies.' "

"I know. But what is madness?" Rossiter shook his head, with a sad smile, and rose to go. As the two friends bade each other goodnight, at the open door, it may well have seemed to Rossiter that Waring answered his own question.

"Do you know, Edward," he said suddenly, as Rossiter was turning to leave, "I believe it was Helen you saw at the door that night."

VII

WARING, however, was not mad; though, as he was well aware, he was subjecting his whole physical and spiritual being to a strain, which might be too great for it. But, a mind less subject to illusion, in the ordinary sense of the term, and more master of itself and its processes, it would be hard to find.

The first passion of his loss he had now transmuted into a purpose, which

he was pursuing with just the same quality of controlled and directed ardor with which a man of science follows up the clue of a discovery which, till he has made it, would sound, to his uninitiated neighbors, like nothing but an idle dream.

The magicians of the modern laboratory indeed were already directing their searchlights far into that debatable land of mists and dreams where he was making his lonely explorations.

Radium, or a vanished face. It was all one. Both were subject to laws of the universe which it was possible to discover and control. It was as possible to discover one as the other. Both were within reach of the passionate seeking mind of man.

"Yes," he said to himself, "the Undiscovered Country is discoverable by those in earnest to discover it. There are trails already winding into it for those who love and dare. But only those can find them."

It was merely a question of finding the way. And he was seeking Helen as calmly and deliberately as a sailor seeking an unknown land consults his charts and takes his reckonings, observes the stars, and studies the tides. No, he was not mad. But he was an immortal being, conscious of his immortality.

He believes so profoundly in Love that he could not believe in Death as well.

FU-WANG was very devoted to his master. They had now been together, two lonely men, for upward of ten years. Waring was literally all the old Chinaman had in the world in the form of human ties, and, in his silent way, he watched over him with the care of a mother and a good servant combined.

Waring, on his side, was far from unaware or unregardful of the unobtrusive faithfulness that kept such exquisite order in his rooms, and anticipated his every need and desire. But, of late there had been a shadow of anxiety on the old servant's brows.

All was not well with his master, and, when he was alone, he would shake his head sometimes, and mutter things in his own tongue that had a perplexed sound. His master's health did not seem as he had always known it. He had grown plainly thinner, and that diaphanous look which his friend Rossiter had noted with some concern was becoming more and more marked.

Fu-Wang put it to his eating too little, and tried to tempt him from his austere diet by cunning dishes, which Waring, however, put by him with a gracious, but determined, negative. Fu-Wang had ventured, indeed, to chide him, to be cross about it in a mother-like way.

"Too much rice! Rice! Rice! Always rice!" he had twittered. "Rice good for Chinaman. Not good all the time for big-man English. Englishman, he pantomimed, needed meat, much meat, not like Chinaman. Rice all right for Chinaman, but Englishman—no good."

However, the sirloin steaks and inch-thick mutton chops Fu-Wang ventured once or twice to thrust under his master's nose went untasted. Waring still kept to his rice and cold water, and would sometimes even forego that and go fasting whole days together.

Then his manner was growing stranger. He was less and less active. The athletic energy of his body seemed to be failing him. Always a silent man, a characteristic which was equally natural to his old servant, he had of late grown curiously abstracted. And sometimes on the rare occasions when Fu-Wang spoke to him, he did not seem to hear. At other times, Fu-Wang would hear

him talking low to himself in a strange voice.

But, one day, he had come upon him sitting straight up in his chair, very still, with his eyes wide open staring before him, as though they were gazing at something, and yet seeing nothing.

He did not seem to know that Fu-Wang was there, though he stood watching him for some moments, and ventured softly at last to steal up to him and look into his eyes.

The Cinaman said to himself that he sat like the holy men he had heard of long ago in China, who sat still year after year in the forests, till their beards grew down to the ground and the birds made nests in their hair. Fu-Wang grew afraid as he looked at him and withdrew softly to his kitchen, pondering.

He pondered for a day or two and then came to a resolution, the result of which was that, one afternoon, Rossiter, seated in his office, was told that an old Chinaman wanted to see him; and, presently stole in, with many reverences, a very inarticulate, and, for one of his race, excited Fu-Wang. But Fu-Wang was able to make his meaning clear, and to make Rossiter understand, too, that his master was not to know of the call.

So, early that evening, Waring was surprised by a visit from his friend whom he had not seen for some time, for Rossiter had grown diffident about calling on him, having realized that, while Waring was as warmly his friend as ever, his desire for seclusion had evidently been growing upon him, and that more and more he wished to be left to himself.

VIII

THIS evening he could not but be aware that his friend had greatly changed. His old servant was right. Rossiter, of course, believed he knew the reason. Those strange studies of his were beginning to tell upon him.

The sword was outwearing the sheath. But a sense of withdrawal behind the cordiality of Waring's manner made him hesitate to speak his thought.

However, as they sat for a while, exchanging friendly generalities, he was casting about in his mind for some means of distracting his friend, of drawing him out, if only for a little, from his unnatural seclusion. Presently he had an idea.

"Have you heard any music, this winter?" he asked.

To his satisfaction, Waring's face instantly lit up, for music was one of his passions.

"Why no! I haven't!" he said. "And I wonder why not." And he added musingly: "Music, that's the very thing!"

"Why not dine with me, then, and let's go to the opera after. They are giving *Parsifal* tonight."

"Excellent! Let us do it. But you shall dine with me. It will save time."

So presently a very much happier Fu-Wang was waiting on them in the little dining-room, giving an occasional respectful twinkle of satisfaction and understanding in Rossiter's direction; even though his master would stick to his boiled rice.

Though, as I have said, Waring was a lover of music, and had, indeed, at one time, attained some skill with an old violin, which was still among the half-regarded bric-a-brac of his rooms, he had not heard any for a long while. To hear it played as his fine taste demanded necessitated contacts with that social world from which he had withdrawn himself. Besides, music to a lonely spirit such as his is like a naked sword in the heart. Its speech is too piteously keen, too profoundly stirring, to be easily endured.

Yet, as the two friends sat together in their box, Waring realized that it was the speech that came nearest to what his whole life was endeavoring to express.

He said to himself that here in music was the divine element in which she now lived, in which she floated invisible, yet exquisite, as these streaming shapes of sound, like sylphs peopling the magic air. It was perhaps in this world of mystically ordered harmonies they were to meet at last. And, as he listened, all faded away from him except the music and the thought of her, which seemed to be one and the same.

The *entr'acte* made for him no break in his enchanted isolation, and he scarcely observed his friend leave the box to exchange greetings with some acquaintances in another part of the house.

While talking with these, Rossiter's eyes caught a glimpse of the lonely figure in the box, and, as the lights went down again, it seemed that something luminous was floating at Waring's side, like a shaft of moonshine. But he dismissed the impression as a fancy. Yet, as he reentered the box, his friend turned to him a face radiant with happiness.

"Since you were away, something lovely has happened to me. Helen has been with me. Music is one of the worlds she lives in. It was a wonderful thought of yours, Edward. I shall find her now."

And, as the music once more welled through the house, he murmured to himself:

Somewhere tonight among the hills of heaven
She walks, with all her stars around her;
And I who lost her here on earth
Grow happy, knowing God has found her.

So many days along all paths of radiance
Made for her feet to tread I sought her,
Through all the wide lagoons of dawn
And mazy lanes of moonlit water.

Now know I by the path of this strange music
Beyond the world she went a-straying,
Almost you bring me where she walks—
Ah! for the love of God, cease not your playing.

IX

FROM this night on, Waring turned to his forgotten violin, and, fired by his desperate purpose it was not long before he had recovered some of his old skill. Those yellowed folios in which he had read so deeply had much to say of the mystic efficacy of music in those realms of which he had by this time mastered many secrets.

There were combinations of sounds that had the evocative power of spells, just as certain words and colors, and perfumes, rightly employed, were capable of producing startling, dream-like results, setting in motion hidden laws and forces controlling the creative rearrangement and transformation of atoms, and literally moulding shapes out of the air.

For to those who know, the air, thin and empty to the uninitiated, glows and throbs with vital substance as obedient to all such processes of the creative will as marble to the life-giving hands of the sculptor.

Waring was at length approaching this mastery, and through the long vigils of the ensuing winter he strove to perfect himself more and more in the various modes of that mysterious art by which he dreamed

of bringing his lost love again to his side.

Night after night, as Fu-Wang laid an anxious head upon his pillow, he would hear the strains of his master's violin, making music of an unearthly beauty, music by turns wild with pain and longing, or calm and sustained as with the authority of an irresistible purpose, or suddenly soft and sweet as with tears of joy.

And there were nights when Fu-Wang at last slept, had he been able to look in on his master, with eyes that could see, he would have seen a strange thing.

For, while Waring played, as though she came walking to him across moonlit seas of sound, Helen, like a form taking shape out of moonlit mist, a being of shadowy silver, would grow silently before him in the still room, with her great gray eyes and heavy air. And more and more, as though the music filled her with life, she would come to seem a being of flesh and blood, color in her cheeks and lips. And once her hand touched him tenderly and her lips brushed his brow—and the hand and lips were warm with life.

But, as he dashed down his violin to take her in his arms, she was suddenly gone, as though her life had stopped with the music.

She was gone, but by this he knew that his dream had been no mere madness. His love *was* stronger than death.

She had come so near. It was in the power of his love to bring her still nearer. And, so by all the ways he knew, he went on striving, and sometimes it was vain, and there were times when he despaired. But then there would come a gleam, a glimpse, a whisper, as if it were close inside his heart, and his faith revived.

At last the spring came, with its soft airs, and its gentle sunshine, and Waring began to think of his mountain wilderness.

"Perhaps," he said to himself, "she will come to me there, and not leave me again."

X

IT was an April afternoon, and he felt tired. Happy as he had grown to be, he was weary with the vigils of the winter. His face had grown worn like a piece of old silver, and the white splashes in his black hair seemed an intenser white. He had been reading, but only half conscious of what he read. He put the book down and rose from his chair.

He would take a little sleep, and he went into a small snuggery divided from the library by an arras from old France, and threw himself down on a divan.

The April sunshine glowed on a jar of dogwood blossoms. He watched it a while and fell asleep.

He had slept but a short time when he was half-awakened by a touch. A hand had stolen into his. There seemed to be someone, some sweetness breathing near him. There was a soft rustle as of a woman's gown. He opened his eyes, in sudden fear. And then an awful joy swept over his heart. It seemed to break within him and fill with light.

For there at his side, as he had last seen her, sat Helen, gently smiling down upon him, in a halo of the April sunshine.

"I have come at last, darling," she said. "Nothing can separate us now."

And, as she spoke, she stretched out her hands toward him, and Waring, in rapture, sprang up and folded her, sweet and throbbing, in his arms.

At that moment, Fu-Wang had drawn aside the curtain and looked

in, seeking his master. He dropped it hastily and withdrew on tip-toe. Half an hour or so later, the little bronze knocker called him to the door. It was Rossiter. Fu-Wang received him with a curiously confidential smile and a finger on lip.

"Lady with him," he half whispered.

"Lady?" exclaimed Rossiter in astonishment.

Fu-Wang made a series of energetic nods, accompanied with little chirps. He was evidently happy that his master's eccentricities had taken this sudden human turn for the better.

"Lady?" again Rossiter exclaimed.

Then Fu-Wang motioned to Rossiter to follow him, as he crossed the room and stopped before the portrait on the wall.

"Lady!" he said, vigorously pointing.

Rossiter's face grew grave.

"Very strange!" he said to himself, adding, "All right, Fu-Wang, I shall wait."

When Fu-Wang had withdrawn, he stood still a long while, and listened. There was no sound from the little room. He waited a few moments longer, and then crossed the room, and softly pulled aside the curtain.

Waring lay alone as in a deep sleep. He was dead.

There was a curious fragrance in the room, a perfume that seemed somehow familiar. Then Rossiter remembered. It was the perfume of the girl on the staircase.

Gold Seekers, Beware!

The first gold seekers of medieval '49 days had not only to fight against hunger, thirst and other ills of the flesh, but also against the terrible griffin. This monster was a winged and feathered lion with the head of an eagle, and in color red, black and white.

They were of such prodigious strength and power of wing that they could pick up a couple of oxen yoked to a plough as easily as a new born lamb. They built their nests on rocky peaks, but for eggs laid agates.

How they reproduced their species is a mystery. The nests were made of gold, and the monsters felt they had a monopoly of the metal, hence their antagonism toward gold diggers.

To circumvent the attacks of the griffin, operations were carried on in the dark. The chief haunts of the griffin were in the Caucasus, and such was their dark fame that those in search of gold went in companies of a thousand and more.

The claws of the griffin, which to modern eyes seem strangely like the horns of the buffalo, were in the middle ages highly esteemed; and made into drinking cups they were used in the cure of epilepsy.

The Green Eye—And So On

By DALE COLLINS

This is the sixth and last of a series of short stories retailing the startling adventures of PETER LAMB.

"ALMOST amazing story," murmured little Mr. Lamb. "Most amazing!" His mild eyes looked at the tanned, hard face of the man opposite him in admiration and awe, while the flush of interest deepened in his cheeks. The tribute was received with a casual nod.

"Yes," agreed the teller of the tale, "it would seem impossible anywhere else, but not here!"

With a gesture he drew Mr. Lamb's attention to the outside world, for they were in Singapore and it was night.

"One only has to travel to realize that romance is not dead. There, as I say, out in the jungle not fifty miles from here sits that god with an emerald in his forehead as big as a hen's egg, guarded by heathen worshipers, and quite inaccessible save for the secret path on which I stumbled."

"Amazing!" reiterated Mr. Lamb, and, having called the boy and ordered another whisky, he took off his glasses and polished them precisely, the heat and the thrill aroused by the story having fogged them slightly.

"Here we sit in the midst of civilization"—he waved a thin hand round the lounge of the Europe—"and within a stone's throw, in a manner of speaking, the mysterious East bowing to a pagan god in the hidden depths of the jungle."

He drew a deep breath, appreciating this fantastic contrast.

"A god with an emerald eye as big as a hen's egg!" the other pointed out again, that the fact might sink home.

"Yes," said Mr. Lamb. "Really, it reminds me of that poem——Do you know much poetry, sir?"

"No," confessed his acquaintance, not smiling at all because a disciplined face was his stock-in-trade, "I'm afraid I do not."

"I heard it some years ago at a church social in Winchester," mused Mr. Lamb. "It made a strong impression upon me. It was called—let me see—ah!—'The Green Eye of the Little Yellow God. It went—dear, dear—ah, yes! 'Tumty-tumty-tumty-tumty-tum, 'Twas the green eye of the Little Yellow God.' It was a splendid piece!"

"I should say so," agreed the hard-faced man politely.

He lifted his glass and drank. There were limits beyond which human strength should not be tested. He was fighting to master an impulse which bade him jump upon his chair and shout Hosanna! for this marvellous, blessed innocent, whom Fate had delivered into his hands at the very moment when such a gift was badly needed.

Things had been so slack of late that the hard-faced man, whose name just then was Major Warburton, had been seriously considering taking up work, as a temporary means of earning a livelihood.

The entry into the hotel lounge of this heaven-sent tourist on the previous day had changed all that.

They talked on, and the boys brought drinks. On the open features of little Mr. Lamb his thoughts strayed for those sharp eyes opposite to read. They were the simple thoughts of a simpleton to whom anything was possible in the exotic setting of the East where all was wondrous strange and new and old.

Major Warburton did not hurry, but when the right time in the evening came, which was between the fourth and the fifth whisky, his nimble fingers began to adjust the bait upon the hook, while Mr. Lamb waited, open-mouthed.

STRIPPED of Major Warburton's elegant and elaborate dressing, the bait consisted of two sets of facts, both simple and unquestionable.

In the first place, he (Major Warburton) was a gentleman, a hard-case and one who had always prepared to take a sporting risk. To put it bluntly, as the major did not, he was prepared to steal the idol's eye, and was equal to the task.

This, very naturally, gave little Mr. Lamb an intense thrill and quite a pleasant shock.

"But," Major Warburton pointed out, "though I am driven to take any risk by the need for ready money and a liking for excitement I am tied to Singapore. What could I do with the stone when I got it?"

"I wonder?" puzzled Mr. Lamb.

The second set of simple facts appeared, as easily as rabbits from a conjurer's hat.

His friend (Mr. Lamb) was also a gentleman and one who was prepared to take a sporting risk in his own way, but, in addition, he was a traveler—an adventurer in the better meaning of the word. And he was sailing from Singapore at midnight on the morrow.

When these two sets of facts were brought together a profitable enterprise of an Arabian Nights character inevitably revealed itself.

Major Warburton could steal the gem; Mr. Lamb could buy it and vanish. No suspicion would attach to Mr. Lamb; no proof could be brought against Major Warburton.

It was, the major said, the kind of chance to which one could not shut one's eyes.

The mild little man in immaculate whites was horrified at first.

"But supposing . . . !" he protested, and "It sounds rather like . . . !" and much beside in the same strain.

The poison of Major Warburton's tongue, however, was as dangerous as that of the serpent's. And all the time the gleam of cupidity grew in the eyes of little Mr. Lamb in the way it must when a humdrum soul peeps into Aladdin's cave.

"Probably nearer the size of a duck's egg," remarked Major Warburton, brooding.

"It's an awful risk," stammered Mr. Lamb, weakening with every breath he drew.

"And a fortune to win," sighed Major Warburton, "a fortune which circumstances compel me to fling away for a song."

"Well, about how much?"

The question was put abruptly and in a hoarse, rather shamed voice.

The bait was taken and all was over save the landing of the fish; but Major Warburton, like a true sportsman, showed no triumph and nobody would have realized that the crisis was past.

"I should say twenty-five hundred as a bare minimum," he answered

prepared to accept a fifth of this amount.

"I could not go beyond twelve-fifty," said Mr. Lamb firmly,

"I risk my life!" mourned the major.

"Fifteen hundred," agreed Mr. Lamb, moved.

"In cash—Straits dollars," stipulated Major Warburton, who held life to be an unstable thing of little value.

It will be seen that the major's methods, if slow, were sure.

As the clock struck eleven they fixed a rendezvous for the following evening.

"I shall go out by car," the major promised.

"And I shall be here tomorrow with the cash," promised Mr. Lamb. "I only hope you, too, are here. A kris thrust in the dark." He shuddered. "Is it worth the risk?"

"It is," said the major simply in his calm, soldierly way.

They parted affectionately, if rather in the manner of conspirators. But as little Mr. Lamb went twinkling along in a rickshaw toward Johnston's Jetty, he marveled greatly at the strangeness of life in foreign parts. He realized that though all this had come to pass and they were involved in a matter of life and death they had not exchanged cards, nor even names.

THE sampan boy taking Mr. Lamb ashore from the *Martina* on the following evening saw no more than a small, humble *tuan* from whom it was possible to demand, if necessary with threats and menaces, four times the legal fare.

Mr. Lamb was vaguely conscious of this, and it led him to meditate upon how seldom things are what they seem.

He looked like any other humble tourist, but his pulses fluttered with a sense of high adventure.

He was aglow in his own mild way with a rather naughty enjoyment of this illicit enterprise.

Despite this, however, he paid the boy's exorbitant demands without a murmur and went on his way, smiling a little nervously behind his small mustache.

The news that he was one who could be robbed with impunity had already been passed on to the rickshaw boy to gladden his heart, although, in any case, having eyes in his head he would have known that.

The meekest of all the looters of history entered the lounge of the Europe and peered about eagerly. His face fell. Major Warburton was not there.

He ordered a drink, with no pleasure, however, but merely to steady his nerves. This would have been obvious to the most casual observer.

Mr. Lamb was a man haunted by a sense of guilt and dreading that his accomplice lay somewhere out there in the warm heart of the tropical night with a foot of wavy steel through his heart.

Having waited for over an hour in this mood, the enthusiasm and relief with which he greeted Major Warburton was as strong as it was genuine. But perhaps it was as well for that gentleman's future safety that there were few beholders of that meeting. Its warmth would have aroused suspicion in the mind of a turtle.

"I had begun to fear the worst, my friend," cried Mr. Lamb, pressing the hard, brown hand.

"There were good grounds," the other confessed, and as he spoke his lined face grayed a little, as if the shadow of the threat of death fell upon it for an instant. "It was a risky business, but one must take a chance," he added, reverting to his usual soldierly acceptance of the risk of life.

His hand, however, trembled slightly as he raised the glass which Mr. Lamb had had filled. In all this there was something more eloquent than any flood of speech could have been.

Their heads drew closer together.

"You have failed?" asked Mr. Lamb, smothering the hope which set beads upon his brow.

"No, I have succeeded," said the major simply.

He gave his mustache a tiny tug of triumph, even twisting up the ends a little, a display of feeling which might be forgiven him.

"You have it?" breathed Mr. Lamb, almost overwhelmed now that the coup was accomplished.

"I have it here in a cigarette tin," said Major Warburton.

In the fashion of the English he made the amazing announcement in the most casual way possible.

He had risked his life for this spoil, but there was no trace of ill-bred feeling about him. It was not for him to grow excited over his own feat.

Mr. Lamb generously grew sufficiently excited for two.

"Show it to me," he urged.

"I'll give you the tin," said Major Warburton. "There are a couple of cigarettes in it. Find some difficulty in getting one. That will give you your chance to take a look at it. But be careful! Remember I have to stay here. It's all right for you."

THE box was passed across, and Mr. Lamb was not blind to the romantic oddness of opening that familiar red tin not to find cigarettes but to look upon the green eye of the little yellow god. He lifted the lid, and his eye grew round. There was cause.

In the bottom of the tin lay the superb emerald, glowing like a ghostly heart in the electric light. It was not, perhaps, quite as large as a duck's egg—possibly it was smaller than a hen's egg—but gleaming greenly in its humble nest it seemed to Mr. Lamb's excited mind to be the size of a roc's egg.

"You will notice," remarked the major under his breath, "the pieces of cement still adhering to the sides where I pried it from the idol's brow.

"The words, spoken in that even voice, gave Mr. Lamb a queer feeling that the major was a Cook's guide showing him, as a matter of course, through the fabled storeroom of the mystic East.

The sight of the cement touched him strangely, for he saw it as a token of daring endeavor. As he looked up, nodding agreement, his face told the major this and thanked him.

Furthermore, whether he knew it or not, his eyes admitted that greed and the desire for possession lurked in his heart as surely as it did in Shylock's.

"But tell me one thing," Mr. Lamb demanded suddenly, and his voice was uneven. "No blood has been shed?"

He handed the tin back suddenly as if afraid of it.

Major Warburton smiled easily.

"I am too old a soldier to spill blood without need," he said. "Tactics—strategy—that's the line I take. None of the guardians of this stone are in the land of the living at the moment"— Mr. Lamb started, but was reassured by a touch of his friend's hand—"though they will be tomorrow. All they'll be suffering from will be headaches."

His voice fell a little.

"Sleeping draughts administered in their food," he explained. "That's why I had to wait until tonight."

He gave a little shrug which said that such things were easy to him.

"But——?" began Mr. Lamb, who in his guilelessness did not understand the machinery by which such adventures are carried through.

Major Warburton, however, commanded silence with a gesture.

"The less we are seen in company now the better for both of us," he declared, stating a truth which might have been overlooked by such a novice as Mr. Lamb. "We'll make the exchange now and be done with it. My heart's sick to think of flinging away a fortune won at such risk for such a paltry sum. One is, however"—his quick, sad smile flashed—"the victim of Fate in this sorry world."

He pushed the precious tin forward a little across the table.

LITTLE Mr. Lamb nodded brightly.

"You have the money?" asked the Major.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Lamb, and Major Warburton was pleased for a second, but no longer, for Mr. Lamb proceeded: "I haven't the cash exactly, but I have a check!"

Something peculiar happened to Major Warburton. He seemed to stiffen and grow sad. He looked at Mr. Lamb in a way which suggested that he was disappointed in him.

"That was not the arrangement," said the major, coldly. "You were to bring cash."

"I know," Mr. Lamb admitted, "but I am a business man and you will understand. Sailing as we are tonight, I have had a lot to attend to."

He moved his hand a little in apology and his eyes looked tired.

"Cables and so on," he explained. "A hard day! I missed the bank by half an hour. My check, however——"

"My dear sir," the major interrupted with dignity, "as a business man you will be the first to see how impossible it is for me to accept your check, which cannot be cleared until tomorrow, when you will be on the high seas. It adds an absurd risk to what is already a foolish transaction from my point of view."

He sat back in his chair with an air of finality, but even while he spoke he was thinking that in view of the astounding innocence of the patient it might be fairly safe to take an unprofessional risk in this case only.

Little Mr. Lamb looked hurt.

"I presume," he said, "you know who I am?"

"Why," the major chuckled, "it's astounding! Here we've known each other all this time and got mixed up in this queer business and yet we've never troubled to find out each other's name. I am Major Warburton, late of the Welsh Guards!"

"Charmed," murmured Mr. Lamb, impressed. "And I am Sir Harold Davenport."

"Sir Harold Davenport!" gasped the major, even more impressed.

His heart sank a little. Robbing the rich is very different from robbing the humble. One gets no titles for it.

Sir Harold's visit to the East was common talk. He owned three steamship lines and tin mines and rubber plantations only to be estimated in vague guesses.

"I had no idea, Sir Harold," said the major in apology, but his wits were working and he wondered.

The magnate accepted this with a tiny bow.

"When I ask you to cash a check I naturally do not want you to do so without some proof of my identity. These I shall show you. But first I trust you will be discreet about this. It is a peculiar business and I must ask you to preserve our secret. For, of course, it would be harmful to me if it came out."

He paused.

"I need not stress the point," he remarked, with a friendly nod, "for,

naturally, it would be even more harmful to you."

"Quite!" the major agreed, but he was thinking that a check would suit him even better than cash if all was in order. A millionaire who had purchased an idol's eye might pay well in the future to have his secret kept.

"For one with political aspirations —India, you know—and so on," murmured Mr. Lamb thinking aloud.

"Quite!" said the major again, though as far as he was personally concerned he did not fear any harm from the imaginary worshippers of a non-existent god.

"But, as you say, it would be unwise for us to linger overlong," Mr. Lamb proceeded. "I had better establish my identity without delay!"

"If you would, Sir Harold," said the major. "You will understand my difficulty?"

"Decidedly," said Mr. Lamb kindly, and he drew from his pocket a handsome and bulging wallet.

It contained Sir Harold's passport, his letter of credit for a fabulous sum, personal papers, a picture of Lady Davenport and the children, which stirred him to a momentary gleam of sentiment, and much besides.

The wallet, indeed, contained sufficient evidence to convict Mr. Lamb ten times over of being Sir Harold.

"I feared that you might make the price too high if I divulged my identity too soon," he explained. "I am a business man as well as a collector of precious stones, you know!"

Major Warburton smiled ruefully.

"You'd never have bought it at that price," he confessed, though not without admiration.

He glanced at his watch.

"Will you excuse me for a moment?" he asked. "I just remember that I promised I would telephone to my wife at half-past ten!"

Mr. Lamb agreed willingly, and Major Warburton, his nimble mind working at pressure, hurried away.

He did not ring up his wife, however, but got onto the manager of Sir Harold's bank at his private house, and by dint of discreet questions and without divulging his name —for the major had a certain reputation in Eastern towns—he established the fact that Sir Harold was on a visit to Singapore, was leaving that night in the *Martina*, and was a small, quiet man with gray hair and glasses.

Further than that he dared not go, nor had he any wish to.

ON his return he greeted his victim with more deference than ever. Mr. Lamb had the checkbook ready on the table and drew out a fountain pen.

"Just one thing, Warburton, he said. "I have bought a number of curios and such things ashore, and I want to settle my accounts in Arab Street. You know what these traders are. Owing to missing the bank I have no ready cash. It's one of the traps of being wealthy!"

He smiled sadly.

The major, who had to pay for everything in advance wherever he was known, had to admit to himself that this was true enough.

"Perhaps if I made my check two thousand, you could get me the balance tonight?"

"But, Sir Harold," protested his friend, "I don't think I could raise that much in cash!"—which was very near the truth.

Mr. Lamb fidgeted, and a tremor of alarm ran through the major. He was good at reading faces. He saw a hesitancy, a loss of interest, the death of a whim, in the magnate's face.

He knew the mind of a man who would pay fifteen hundred dollars for a ruby which he had hardly seen. He

would blow cold as quickly as he blew hot.

"While you've been away, do you know, Warburton, I've been thinking the whole thing over," Mr. Lamb remarked. "There's an awful lot of risk in it. I'll consider the matter further before we close.

"I shall be back in Singapore in a fortnight. I can settle my bazaar accounts then, and we can go into it again. It's getting late. I should have liked to have cleared things up and been done with them, but——!"

He made an impatient movement.

Major Warburton, as he had stated, was prepared to take sporting risks. It might not have been worth betting seven hundred and fifty dollars for the sake of winning fifteen hundred, but he saw this check as the first in a long series, and felt he was acquiring what might easily prove to be a modest annuity.

"I must get this stone out of my possession," he said. "I'd like to clinch it and be done with it. If you'll wait here fifteen minutes I'll try to raise the cash, and we can close the thing. That will leave you free.

"Otherwise, I'm afraid the stone will never be yours, and frankly my wish is to realize at once, and with the least possible trouble, even though I might get more from a dealer. Can you give me fifteen minutes?"

Like most men of wealth and idleness, Mr. Lamb was easily swayed. Major Warburton had been sure of that.

"Oh, very well, major, as long as you'll return as quickly as possible!"

"Then you'll excuse me," said the major and fled.

As he had hoped, he found the purser of the ship on which he was traveling at the Hotel van Tromp.

The purser was a man of Christian charity, and not averse to a rogue who could tell a good story. He liked the major, knowing he could not rob a purser.

"You have seven hundred and fifty of mine in the safe aboard," said the major. "Will you endorse my check for that amount and get the proprietor here to cash it? I want some ready money urgently."

The purser considered, saw no risk, obtained a receipt, and being an old patron secured the notes for the passenger who did so well at cards, but whose business was no concern of any save those whom he robbed.

The major, rather out of breath, found Mr. Lamb awaiting him. The need for haste seemed to have grown clearer in each mind, and the transaction was over in three minutes.

Thereafter Mr. Lamb and Major Warburton parted with brief words and went their way through the cloaking gloom of the Eastern night. Each smiled, happily.

MR. LAMB was the last passenger to board the *Martina*. He was no sooner up the accommodation ladder than it was hoisted, and the water awoke about the liner's bows as she slid out across the jeweled harbor to the wide spaces of the sea.

After making inquiries in places where he could not be found, Mr. Lamb discovered Sir Harold Davenport in the bar.

As Mr. Lamb entered and saw the small, bowed, frail figure, he mused what a difference wealth made.

Mr. Lamb was also small and bowed and frail, but if his wallet containing precious documents had disappeared from his cabin he would have been branded a fool for leaving it lying about, and told that it served him right.

Sir Harold's loss that morning, however, had kept the whole ship in turmoil.

Mr. Lamb burst in upon the magnate jubilantly.

"I have your wallet!" he cried.

"*What?*" gasped Sir Harold, who liked Mr. Lamb, but had a rooted objection to practical jokes.

Mr. Lamb explained, as well as excitement would allow.

A man whom he described in detail and who said his name was Major Warburton had met Mr. Lamb in the Europe. He had told some cock-and-bull story about buying the wallet from a native.

Mr. Lamb had recognized it. Time was short. Mr. Lamb had done what seemed to him the best thing in the circumstances. He had bought the wallet and its contents from this major person for five hundred Straits dollars.

"My dear Lamb!" cried the magnate, and while he inspected the papers continued to pant his thanks.

And then he discovered that a check had been used, and he was alarmed. Mr. Lamb again came to the rescue.

"Quickly, Sir Harold," he said. "We must get up and see the pilot. He can take the full story and description ashore and stop payment. When this fellow Warburton tries to cash it tomorrow he'll be identified, and he'll have to explain a great deal better how he came by that wallet than he did to a poor simpleton like me."

Sir Harold agreed that it was a splendid idea.

LITTLE Mr. Lamb sat in his cabin making shorthand entries in his little black book and musing to himself, as was his habit when off duty.

"The gain is small," he remarked, "and though it is against my principles, I must include the money from Sir Harold because I cannot refuse it."

He nodded several times, thoughtfully.

"It was worth doing," he said. "It is well to make the way of the transgressor hard on every occasion. They'll never believe him because he preys on society and so is known.

"It is a far, far better thing to prey on the birds of prey. They are unprotected, and professional pride prevents them talking even among themselves.

He looked at the valueless piece of green glass in the cigarette tin.

"I should like to keep this to gladden the heart of some little child," he murmured. "But perhaps it will be safer to fling it through the porthole!"

The green eye of the little yellow god was lost for ever in the ocean, and Mr. Lamb lit the somewhat bent cigarette which remained in the tin.

The unusual plus the unexpected

"Bringing Home the Bacon"

BY EVERETT SHINN

A two part story beginning in our next issue—out May 15.

Nobody Ever Died in This House

By ROBERT W. SNEDDON

"NOBODY ever died in this house, so if you've got an idea in your head that I'm going to pass out, you're miles off the mark, my lad."

Roger Marlowe chuckled as he answered my apprehensive look and relapsed into the big chair with a gust of coughing.

"Gosh! sounds fierce, but I'm safe as long as I stick to the old homestead," he added.

"What do you mean—nobody ever died in this house?" I queried curiously.

"Just as I said. The darned old place is close onto two hundred years old, and yet in all its long history, there's not a single known instance of any of its occupants dying in it."

I pondered over this.

We were sitting in the quaint old-fashioned living room with its beamed roof of aged timber polished by the hand of time to a mellow brown. A fire of sea timber burned with green flame in the wide brick fireplace, with occasional snapping spurts which sent sparks flying against the wire screen.

Outside the winds of blustering February were holding a fantastic revel under the overhanging eaves, moaning in a melancholy cadence. From the three low windows set in a cluster I could see the whitecaps of the bay whipped to fury by the lash of a stiff gale.

From the rocks some fifty yards away came a continuous smashing mingled with the hollow sucking of the waters of the Atlantic as they fell back time and again, disappointed of their prey.

I had come there on Roger's invitation to spend a week, and fascinated by the wilderness of the New England coast had stayed on. The week had lengthened into two. Besides, I hated to leave Roger alone except for an old lady, Mrs. Rogers, whom he called Aunt Hannah.

I was worried about him. He was thin to emaciation and there was too brilliant a flush in his sunken cheeks, too wild a light in his eyes. His spirits and courage were indomitable. If he had to fall his colors would fly to the last fatal moment; not that I anticipated this.

He swore there was nothing wrong with him. He had been pounded, tapped, X-rayed, blood-tested and all the rest of the medical performance. Not a thing had been found. Just a run-down condition, without reason or cause.

I broke the silence in the room with a laugh.

"It's a new one on me, Roger. I've heard of houses that were regular death-traps—whoever ventured in them was as good as doomed—under

some evil spell as it were; but this is the first time I've ever heard of a house that was a protection against death; throwing out a shield, scaring off the old Reaper. Nothing queer about the house, is there? It's not haunted?"

"Does it feel like a haunted house?" he asked abruptly.

"No! Can't say that it does. You can usually catch some idea of that—a queer feeling that you're on the edge of some calamity—or a sensation that your every-day doings are being watched by unseen eyes that aren't particularly enamored of your presence, resentful in fact, and that just as soon as you go out, it was ready to give you a good psychic kick to hasten your departure. But I haven't felt anything like that here."

"And you wouldn't if you lived here a hundred years."

"It's the most restful house I ever was in," I said. "I've felt it, too. I sleep like a log all night long; no dreams, nothing. No, I guess the place is free from spooks. I don't suppose you've ever heard any unaccountable noises?"

"Not a one. No disembodied hand taps at the doors or windows; no ghostly foot clumps up and down the staircase in the night. No, sir, this is a normal, sensible house on all but that one point. You couldn't die in it if you wanted to, badly. So you see, I'm safe as houses——"

"Safe as this house!" I corrected him with a grin.

It did me good to see him so cheerful.

"I will say though, when I arrived here and got a look at you, you scared me, you old figurehead; but I guess I needn't worry. This is the family mansion, isn't it?"

"Been in the family since 1769 or thereabouts."

"Funny you never mentioned it to me in the old days," I commented. "How did you fall heir to it? It was not your father's, was it?"

"No. It belonged to my uncle Silas, and, by rights, on his death, it should have come to Silas Junior, only—" he hesitated.

"Died, eh?" I interjected.

"Yes. They both went fishing one day. They were used to the sea. You see ours is a real old salt family, and you'd have thought they'd have noticed a storm blowing up. They evidently didn't, or thought they could weather it. The boat was picked up on the rocks a couple of miles below here. My uncle's body turned up in a few days, but not my cousin's. Never found his."

"Tough luck!"

"You see," added Roger, with an oddly furtive glance at me, "they shared the same fate as the rest. Didn't die in this house."

I KNEW no reason for it, but the reiteration of that sentence took on the aspect of an ancient prophecy—No one shall die in this house—and it gave me a queer nervous feeling all at once.

"But great heavens, Roger," I said quickly, "you don't mean all your people got drowned."

He laughed at the note of apprehension which had crept into my voice.

"Not a bit of it. Lots of them die on land like any landlubber. Only, as I said, they never seem to have the satisfaction of going aloft from their own deck; never die in their own beds."

"Well, I guess that's why I rest so easy in my old wooden bed upstairs. There's no taint of death lurking in the worm holes. You ought to advertise the place. There's a fortune in it. You'd have a waiting list of hypochondriacs a mile long waiting to get room and board here."

"You ask Aunt Hannah," he chuckled. "The dear old thing thinks she has her hands full as it is with us two. By-the-bye, I don't know if I told you, but she's really some relative of the family, a cousin of sorts. If you want to hear any of the history of the house, get her going. I guess you want to get back to your book?"

I yawned and stared drowsily at the fire. I suppose by rights I should have been out exercising, but the house was too comfortable a refuge for any but the most hardened of Arctic explorers to be out-of-doors.

Roger got up and stood at the window. After a while as he made no sound or movement, I turned my head and looked at him. He was posed in a queer attitude, leaning forward, his hands on the sill; and though his eyes were on the sea, his head was t u r n e d to one side as though he was straining to hear some sound.

"Hear anything?" I asked.

I thought he might have heard some ship in distress.

"Eh?" he started. "No! Whatever makes you ask?"

"Oh, nothing. Just came to my mind."

"Just the sea," he said slowly and returned to the fire.

When I went to bed that night in the low-ceilinged room with its quaint wavy paper and antique furniture, after I blew out my candle, I lay for quite a time letting my mind wander back over our conversation.

HAVE you ever stopped to think about the intensity of life all around you?

Life is not confined to the animals that walk on two, four or even the hundred legs of the centipede, to the birds of the air, the things that creep upon the earth, the creatures that swim in the water; but it pulses also in the things of the earth.

The cabbage has life development, decay. The air is in constant activity. A drop of water is a world of scurrying life. Every inanimate object is composed of atoms temporarily assembled, and in every atom is life. When you come to consider it, there is nothing supernatural in a piece of furniture roving from one spot to another, and that without the agency of spirit hands.

Put your ear to a tree and you can hear the sap flow in it; and the earth—put your ear down to it and you hear it talk and hum. It's living, breathing, just as you and I. Far fetched, fantastic ideas? Not a bit of it. Perfectly logical and scientific.

And as we humans are made up of atoms, why shouldn't a patch of ground have life even as man? Why not an individuality, a personality, an entity of its own?

So, too, the house that stands upon it, part and parcel of it, its limbs, trunk, perhaps its brains, for added to it is the ingenuity, the concentrated purpose, the creative energy of man the builder.

And suppose this entity has certain definite ideas, such as an intense love of life, a hatred of death? Why shouldn't it bend every effort to carry them out, to ensure that no dweller within its walls should ever disturb its serenity with the departing struggle.

I got this far in my musings when I must have fallen asleep, for I wakened to find the sun up, and a brilliant glare striking up from the ground outside.

When I rose and looked for the cause, I drew a long breath. Before me stretched a coverlet of the purest white, a lawn of snow which ran from house to rocks without a blemish or footmark.

"It's a good thing," said Mrs. Rog-

ers, whom I found setting the breakfast and saluted her with a comment on the beauty of the scene, "a good thing there's plenty food laid in, for we'll have more snow, and there'll be no going to the village. I hope you can take condensed, for Joe Hinds ain't showed up with the milk."

I assured her I could manage, seeing I took my coffee black.

"We should worry," I added cheerfully, "we're as snug as a bug in a rug. Let it snow all it wants. The house can stand it."

"It has stood a lot in its day," she answered slowly, "and I guess it will be standing when we're gone."

I looked at her sharply, stirred by the solemnity of her tone. A little woman as stature went, but somehow you felt she was unusually tough and strong. She had a rather flat sallow face, but her lips had a certain tightness and her eyes were still black and snapping. A determined antagonist in an argument, I imagined.

Though she did most of the housework, with the aid of a village woman who came in at times, by some miracle her hands were plump and white with well-kept nails. Her voice was low, with an old singing quality that somehow got at the roots of you.

You had the feeling, without knowing why, that she was an extraordinary woman, not one you could altogether love, but one you could talk to on most subjects of human interest without the aid of explanatory diagrams.

She seemed a little taken aback by my study of her for she turned quickly away with a swirl of her long black skirt. No flapper fashions for her.

In fact there was just a suspicion of a bustle in the appropriate place, a first sight of which had rather amused me. After I had been there a couple of days it seemed all right, and I had a feeling that if approached in the right way she had a story to tell, and I never pass up a story.

Not that I had come with that purpose. I looked for none from Roger, who is an artist, though of more imagination than technique, and consequently too often in the old days when we shared a studio in New York had reached rock bottom of his finances.

No one was happier than he when he fell heir to this old New England house and a fair income, and could repay the debts of hospitality.

His invitations had been insistent, and I had finally taken him at his word. One of the best fellows in the world was Roger Marlowe.

AFTER breakfast Roger went off to his workroom, where he was busy on a ship model. He was now rigging it. Eighteenth century ship. I had expressed my surprise at not seeing any plan or old engraving to copy, but he shook his head.

"I know every line of the old hookers of that day. Comes natural to me, I fancy. We were shipbuilders in those days. If you ask Aunt Hannah, she'll tell you—'All our men were shipbuilders those days'— that's how she puts it."

I watched him for a while, then sauntered out to the kitchen. I wanted to learn more about this dwelling of—I couldn't give it a name—though vaguely at the back of my mind was an apposite quotation.

Mrs. Rogers was peeling potatoes, a job I took off her hands.

"Me set down and do nothing?" she objected. "I never was one much for setting. My mother used to call me quicksilver, I was that active. It takes a pile of doing to make me tucker out, though there's work for four in help in this old house."

"It's a lovely house, Mrs. Rogers. I think Roger's lucky to have it. I wish he'd get rid of that cough of his, though."

"I'm going to see if I can't get me a bottle of Jamaica," said Mrs. Rogers nodding, "I never did see a Marlowe house where there wasn't a bottle of rum in the cupboard, against a cold. Sailor blood needs sailor drink. It ain't no use flying in the face of Providence."

"You'll be flying in the face of prohibition," I suggested.

"By King!" she exclaimed, and rather inappropriately as I thought an instant later, "there was a doing once over tea, and there'll be a doing over rum if so be I set my mind on it."

"I believe you," I said. "Down with the tyrants, eh! There speaks your ancestors, Mrs. Rogers, and, by-the-bye, I'm ever so curious about them. Do tell me something about the Marlowes who owned this house. Roger said they all were connected with the sea."

"Yes, all our men were ships," said Mrs. Rogers, as she finally consented to sit down in the windsor chair, "all of them till it came to Roger's uncle Silas.

"Silas was the first not to take to the sea. He opened a store in Boston and did well, but his father was a whaler. Somewhere in the house are his logs. You ask Roger to let you see them. They're real quaint and fancy. Whenever they got a whale, they stamped the page of the log with a wooden block that printed the shape of a whale.

"Joseph William had two whalers, he had, and used to go to sea himself. I can just remember him, a queer silent sort of man with a big beard, walked lame 'count of slipping down a hatchway on a piece of blubber when he was twenty-three."

I hesitated, then asked:

"Did he die at sea or on land?"

"Died here," said Mrs. Rogers, promptly. I was disappointed. This did not coincide with Roger's story, but she added, "leastways within a stone's throw of the house. He fell sick and lay for days like dead.

"My aunt Lal was looking after him, and how it came about no one knows for certain, though there were some that blamed her. Seems she must have fallen asleep and I don't blame her, for I know what 'tis to wait for death, and she left him all tucked up for the night.

"Well, she waked up feeling chill and gets up to throw another cover over him. You may judge of her surprise when she finds he ain't there. The bed's empty. So she hollers to the help and Silas who was home then, and they come a-running.

"And when they looks about the house and find he ain't there, they goes outside, and there he is over to the barn, lying on the hay, peaceful and quiet forever.

"However he got that far beat them, and it beats me, for from all accounts he was past creeping, let alone walking. But then Joseph William always did agree he would never die in this house."

"There is a legend then," I suggested cautiously, "nobody ever dies in this house."

"Legend nothing," she said briskly, but an odd look came into her eyes, "it just happens. What's the cause I ain't a-saying, though they do say in old days this ground was where the witches met to give themselves to the Black Man, as they called the Devil then. Why, didn't Joseph William's father come to his end within sight of his own door?"

My mind flew outward to the sea.

"Drowned?"

"Dear, no! He was never made to be drowned; a wild fellow he was. I never was one for scandal, but seeing

we're talking, and truth being stranger than the story books as I have heard say, I'll tell you, knowing it wont go further.

"Seems after he lost his first wife in childbirth he went crazy mad about a girl, Rose Anne Perry, a black haired slip of a thing, and he courted her. A great handsome man, if what they say is true. One of them silhouettes in the parlor is him, the one to right of the chimney piece.

"Well, what they arranged no one knows, but he goes to sea with his ship, bound to Chiney. And when he comes back all loaded down with chests of silk and necklaces of amber, and monkeys and gods and idols and the like all carved in ivory and jade, he finds Rose Anne grown tired of waiting and got herself married to one Ambrose Hart.

"So the darkness sinks into his spirit and he takes to drinking. Wouldn't nothing have happened if he had stuck to rum, but he tries all the foreign liquors. One time he goes to Ambrose Hart's. He sees Rose Anne in the garden and he speaks to her gentlelike, saying he loves her in spite of all, and then he goes off the handle.

"So she gets scared of his wild talk and his flashing eyes and screams for Ambrose, and when he comes out and sees who's there, the fat is in the fire.

"The two go at each other, and where it came from no one says, but there was the flash of a knife, and Chris, that's Great-grandfather Marlowe, goes down with a cruel wound in his breast. But when he staggers to his feet, sweeps off his hat with a flourish, and without a word, seeing he has lost Rose Anne's love forever, goes off like a gentleman.

"Seems, however, the wound was deeper than he thought, for Joseph William who was nought but a boy of eight or nine saw him coming to the house walking very stiff, and all at once he fell, and when they got to him, he was dead.

"They did try to get Ambrose, but he swore the other drew on him first, and he acted in self defence; and the knife being Christopher's they let him alone."

"CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE," I said, struck by a sudden thought. "Was he descended from the play writer—the one in Shakespeare's day?"

"Never heard if it was," said Mrs. Rogers, calmly.

"He died in a brawl, too," I added. "Queer, now you think of it."

" 'Nothing's queer,' you'll say when you live as long as I have. Christopher died in 1840, aged 43. You can see his stone over to the churchyard. His pa was the long lived one. Had Chris when he was 57. Died about the time of Waterloo. Born in 1740, if I ain't mistaken as to dates, which is rare with me. My ma used to say I had too much of a head for figures. Should have been a boy, and——"

"Just a minute, Mrs. Rogers," I begged, "just one thing puzzles me. I can understand the men folk meeting death out of the house, but you don't mean to say the woman folk of the Marlowes weren't allowed to die inside the house."

I don't know why I said *allowed* but somehow the word came tripping off my tongue.

"Weren't allowed?" she echoed.

She smoothed her apron as if to hide some inward emotion aroused by the word, and for a moment I had the sensation that I had touched upon the spring of some ghastly mystery. If I had, however, Mrs. Rogers was ready for me.

"No!" she said briskly, as though there had been no intermission in her thought. "No woman, chick or child

ever met death in this house. There was Mrs. Joseph William now. She died in Boston, visiting her son, Silas. Took sick of a chill and died in his arms.

"And Silas's sister, Amy May that couldn't have been more than eighteen, and should have died by rights here, if she was a-going to die at that age, was took by a strange sickness and died in Worcester, a-visiting a girl friend, and was buried right there."

"Where did Mrs. Silas die?" I asked, urged on by some unaccountable curiosity.

"She had tumors and Silas took her to New York for an operation. Poor thing, she was that hopeful, and the operation took splendid. She was all set to come back home and they was on the boat to Boston when she had a relapse and died in her bunk. It was a sad blow to Silas."

"It's ghastly," I said, with a shudder, "death, death, nothing but death."

"Well," said Mrs. Rogers, composedly, "it's what we all come to, sooner or later, young man."

"But this old house stands on, healthy and strong. You'd almost think it flourished on all these deaths."

"Eh!" she reproved me sharply. "What sort of talk is that? I'm a Christian woman, I'd have you know."

"I'm sorry," I apologized. "I think you said Mrs. Christopher died in childbirth—in a hospital, I suppose."

What prompted me to harp on the subject, I don't know.

"Let me see now," mused Mrs. Rogers, a faraway look in her eyes.

"By gosh," I said to myself, "I know now what you might be—a Salem witch with your little bright black eyes. Goody Rogers."

"Oh, yes, I remember now. Of course. Seems she was terrible fond of Chris, and it being near her time, speaking plainly, she didn't want him to see her condition, proud of her looks she was. The idea got such a hold of her mind, she was near to being crazed.

"She kept to her room, and then she took to hiding herself, going over by the rocks by Sharks' Tooth point. There was a parcel of gypsies used to camp there, and she'd talk to them. Well the long and short of it 'tis that Joseph William was born in a gypsy tent, one of those low tents of bent-over boughs. Nothing would persuade Mrs. Chris to let herself be carried back to the house. She got an uncommon prejudice against it.

"Well, Chris kept on a-persuading, being a man to have his own way, and they was a-carrying her back when her breath snuffed out like a candle.

"But I could be setting here all morning talking. And there was Chris's brother, Timothy.

"He was taken sick and felt near to death, so he hires a post chaise to take him to the house, for he knew well it were a place where death never entered.

"He gets as far as the end of the road there, when something starts the horses a-going—some say a black cat, some say a great ugly shadow, it being a moonlight night. The post chaise upsets, and Timothy's neck is broken."

WE both seemed to have enough of this catalogue of deaths, for Mrs. Rogers rose to her feet with a snap of her tight lips, and I followed her example.

Yet though this seemed a signal for my dismissal, something in her attitude held me, an unspoken question in her eyes. She came close to me and lowered her voice.

"You're mighty close to Roger, ain't you?"

There was something wistful in the question which touched me.

"Yes, I'm devoted to him," I answered.

She cast a hasty, apprehensive glance at the door, and moistened her lips before she spoke.

"Did he ever speak to you of any girl?"

"Since I came here?"

She nodded.

"No!"

"There's a-something preying on his mind; all them high spirits ain't real, they're acting. Oh, maybe I'm wrong, but I'm terrible afraid it's over a girl I wouldn't hire to work in my kitchen. He used to go a-painting her till I could hold my tongue no longer; I told him the truth, God forgive me. If you get the chance go look in the room next yours. He used that for a studio a while."

Then, as though she had said too much, she added bruskly:

"Now, you get about your business. Kitchen ain't no place for you."

I retired then. Roger was still at his model.

"What in thunder have you and Aunt Hannah been jawing about? I heard the murmur of your voices. When she gets going she's like an old oracle—one of those, what d'ye call 'em — sibyls — sort of mesmerizes you."

"Oh, we were having a heart-to-heart," I said lightly. "She's shaping up dandy."

"The ship? Ye-es! I guess she'll do. Funny thing I used to loathe the sea. I'd walk miles for a swim in fresh water, but salt—I'd just as soon have dived into a tanner's vat. And as for doing this—whew! Some change! I can't account for it. Ever since I came here."

"Your ancestral origins cropping out, old man! Only don't overdo it. You need some fresh air."

"I must get it finished," he said, with a dogged air. "Never mind me. I'm a terrible host, I know, but I must get it finished, you see."

"Yes," I said, though I was puzzled by his earnestness over a trifle. "All right. You go ahead. I'll amuse myself."

I went up to my room to get something or other, and, passing the door of what Mrs. Rogers said had been used as a studio, I opened the door and peeped in. A lot of odds and ends, an easel and, against the wall, a stack of canvases.

I was drawing back my head when all at once I had the oddest feeling that I was meant to go further; that something or someone in the house was controlling my action; that Mrs. Rogers had wanted me to look at those canvases; that she was frightened and in her extremity had turned to me with a plea for help which family pride had prevented her making more explicit.

I went in now and approached the canvases. Six or seven seascapes of uneven merit, and then a canvas, its face toward the wall. I picked it out carelessly and glanced at it.

But this was no piece of fumbling brushwork, it was a portrait, strong in execution, inspired in beauty, the head and shoulders of a girl. I stared at it, fascinated. So this was Roger's model.

How had he managed to find her in this part of the country, such warmth and richness of complexion, such magnificent eyes, such luscious lips with just such a trace of coarseness, such an emanation of life and vitality.

At first I had an impression of spirituality in spite of this vivid animalism, and then with growing uneasiness I began to get the underlying message, the dark significance of something indescribably evil, vile.

With a hasty gesture I thrust back the canvas and scuttled noiselessly

out of the room. In the hall I drew a long breath, as if to rid my lungs of something foul which had crept into them.

I sat on my bed for a long time, staring at nothing, debating with myself whether I should tell Roger I had pried upon his secret. Then weakly I resolved to bide my time. If he mentioned it, I'd tell him frankly. And if I got a chance I'd speak to Mrs. Rogers.

ROGER had to be called several times for lunch and, when he did appear, gobbled down his food unceremoniously without comment, and disappeared again into his workshop.

I monkeyed about the house for a little, miserably wondering if I should talk to Mrs. Rogers, but her manner had taken a remote turn, and it held me back.

Finally I put on a heavy sweater and, going out to the woodshed, got the bucksaw going. I was just getting up steam when a ramshackle old wagon drew up at the entrance to the yard, and Joe Hinds, carrier, milkman and general conveyer of errands, gave me a hail.

"Couple o' bottles milk for Mrs. Rogers," he said as he set them on a board nailed to the head of a gate post.

I checked him as he shook his reins.

"What's your hurry, Mr. Hinds?"

At that moment I was ready to talk to anyone. Queer how at times when you're worried you have to shoot off your face.

I was amazed to see him cast a look of—it couldn't be terror, or was it?—at the old house, as if he was ready to whip up the skinny, gray horse in the patched shafts. And then he must have changed his mind.

"Keeping busy, I see."

"Keeping warm, anyway," I grinned up into his tanned face. Fine-looking old fellow with an amazingly good set of teeth, a rare thing in the country.

"Takes a pile of wood to heat that house, yet it sure is a house in a thousand, built to stand forever. Good seasoned ship's timber."

"Yes, now I think of it, that's true. Ship's timber, all hand-hewn, too."

"He as built it knew what he was a-doing. Putting up a monument, as you might say."

"Silas Ames Marlowe, you mean. I suppose he got the timber right to hand on the shore. There's some thundering big logs down there now. Seawrack."

Mr. Hinds made a mysterious grimace and bent down, lowering his voice.

"*Seawrack* is the word. They say the old man weren't above contriving a bit of a wrack on his own."

I considered this a moment.

"You mean he wilfully wrecked ships."

"Yes, sir. A lantern on the horns of a cow looked mighty like the riding light of a ship bobbing up and down in these days. They hadn't no port nor sta'bord lights when the old man was planning his wickedness.

"Many a ship piled up thar by the point; and where the plunder went Silas could have told, but he kept his counsel. Kept on a-counting dead men's gold in the candlelight behind the shutters of the house he built."

"He must have been a pretty fair old rascal, Mr. Hinds."

"Used to go a-sailing to Africa and come back from the Guinney Coast with ivory; black ivory; yes, sir."

"A slaver, too?"

"Yes, why, that house is built on some of the coast of Africa stones brought back as ballast, and other things."

He drew a sharp breath before he

added, cupping his hand to his mouth, as though he was afraid of another overhearing his confidence:

"You go down that cellar and look around. Mebbe you'll see what might have been an idol-stone shaped like a devil, built in the wall. I guess someone made mighty powerful medicine with that juju."

"Juju!" I ejaculated.

My mind flew to what I had read of the obscene rites and unclean worship performed in the African darkness.

"How on earth do you know all this?" I asked, staring at him.

I was amazed to see his nostrils dilate. For the first time I noticed how wide they were.

"Lawsy! 'Tain't no mystery. The old man done bring my people here from Africa, sold unto Silas Ames Marlowe to be his slaves and chattels."

"I had no idea you were colored, Mr. Hinds," I faltered, taken aback by the relevation.

"Yes, sir," he said, with admirable dignity and a touch of old courtesy. "I got good black blood in my veins, best in the country, since the days of George Washington."

I had a sudden idea.

"Say, I wish you'd show me that stone down in the cellar. Have you time to spare? I don't suppose Mrs. Rogers would mind."

But I was not prepared for the almost ludicrous expression of superstitious fear which leaped into his eyes.

"No, sir, I don't go in that house, no, sir," he mumbled.

He put out a shaking hand, as if to ward off further advances, and at that moment a sharp voice called from within the house:

"That you, Joe Hinds? Brought me any milk?"

Mr. Hinds' manner changed instantly.

"Yes, Mrs. Rogers, I sure have. Left it on the post." He turned to me. "How's Mr. Marlowe? I fear he's feeling pretty sick."

I don't know why I challenged this.

"He's all right!" I said curtly.

The carrier nodded as he looked up at the sky.

"Like more snow," he said. "Bad time for a Marlowe to be sick; mighty bad. Well, I guess I better get home for supper or my daughter'll be making a fuss." He hesitated awkwardly. "You tell him to stay in the house—see. Better so, mebbe."

He made an odd gesture toward the house with his left hand, and drove off with a great show of haste.

I STOOD staring after him. I don't know why, but the presence of the man had had a strange effect on me, and his simple query as to Roger's health had taken on a dark and symbolic utterance. I couldn't make out whether it was menace or what.

I worked for a time and then went in with the milk.

"Queer fellow, that Hinds!" I said to Mrs. Rogers.

"Hard-working man," she said quickly; "minds his own business and attends church regular. I got a great regard for Joe. Guess he has plenty to worry him at home."

"I had no idea he was colored," I continued. "He told me his people were slaves to old Silas Ames."

"He told you that, did he?" she said, with a sharp look at me. "What more did he say, I wonder?"

She was washing dish cloths in a pan, but something in the set of her back, a certain rigidity of the muscles, told me that she was more interested than she wanted to let me know.

"Oh, just about the house being built of sea timber, and old Silas Ames' ways," I answered cautiously. "He seemed scared to come any nearer the house, I suppose, on account of that thing in the cellar. Funny how old inborn fears creep out again."

"What you mean c r e e p out again?"

She turned to me, and I was alarmed to see how pale and trembling she was.

"Looky here, what did that black man say to you?"

I was quite taken aback.

"Why—why—about the idol—and oh—that it was mighty bad for a Marlowe to be sick in the snow."

She looked as if she were about to faint and sought around for a chair. I hastily thrust one forward and she sat down, drying her hands nervously on her apron and twisting the linen about them. I stood there like a ninny.

"I'm terribly sorry, Mrs. Rogers," I said at last, moved by her distress. "Perhaps I shouldn't have questioned Joe."

" 'Tain't Joe. Joe's all right; it's that——" She bit off the word. "Old Silas Ames was the first," she a d d e d, somewhat disconnectedly, "who hanged himself in the barn. Black as the ace of spades he was when they found him."

She caught the arms of the chair.

"What I've been through! First it was the bird's skull outside that poor boy's window, and then the bunch of feathers. Oh, he never saw them, I saw to that. What did them things mean?"

"No voodoo work, but who—in this day and generation?"

She appeared to disregard my exclamation. All at once she put out her hand and caught my arm in a grip so tight that I winced.

"Don't you ever say a word to Roger, d'ye hear. He don't know, and he'll never git it out of me. And don't you go prying down that cellar. What's there ain't fit for human eyes—the nasty beastly figger.

"Old Silas Ames did a bad turn when he built that in, and a worse one when he drove his black slave to the work of building. When he refused he took his hide whip to him, beat him most unmercifully and threw him out in the snow to die.

"And when he begs to be taken in, and old Silas curses at him, he says he put a curse on the new house. He says, as he ain't allowed to die in a house, nobody will ever be allowed to die comfortable in this very house we're a-setting in.

"And I ain't slept a wink for nights, knowing in my heart there's someone stirring up the old trouble, and God help me—I feel that helpless—but don't go for to say a word of this to Roger."

I was too stunned by this breathless confidence to do anything but nod. Mrs. Rogers rose to her feet and resumed her toils, but she was trembling so, the wet cloths kept slipping out of her fingers.

I could see she wanted me to go, and I went up to my own room feeling as if every nerve in my body was on edge, a strange suspicion shaping itself in my mind.

I shall never forget that evening.

Had I only had the faintest inkling of what was in Roger's mind I might have acted differently.

AFTER dinner Roger sat with the hull on his knee, knotting endless tiny ropes with an intense and silent absorption.

Mrs. Rogers rocked to and fro in an old chair, and the nervous click-click of her knitting needles seemed to exercise a strange restraint on me. I don't believe we exchanged

more than a couple of sentences for hours.

"Snowing hard," said Mrs. Rogers once.

And indeed we could hear it tap-tap against the closed wooden shutters.

"Sea smells very strong tonight. That's odd with the snow," said Roger, dilating his nostrils as he threw back his head.

When Mrs. Rogers had gone up to bed with stern commands to see that before we retired for the night we should see the fire was banked, Roger laid his ship down and lit his pipe.

"Queer thing life," he remarked out of the void. "Just as you get everything settled, something upsets it—completely overthrows the plan. I was all set for Paris, but now, I don't know. I've a feeling I'm going on a voyage—sea voyage. God, I'd give everything now to go to Africa."

"That comes of your shipbuilding, my friend," I said. "That's a beautiful thing you've made, Roger."

"Beauty, the shapeliest of all created things—bar one," he added half under his breath, as if he had been unfaithful to an ideal.

It was on my lips to speak of that canvas upstairs. An instant of hesitation and the chance was lost.

"A ship under canvas," continued Roger, and he talked with myself as silent listener, talking with an enthusiasm that was rather perturbing—that is the word—a feverish excitement, striding up and down as though on his own quarter-deck, glancing up aloft as though to catch the set of the sails.

We said good-night about eleven. I left Roger standing by the fire, and went up to my room.

For a time after I got between the blankets I heard him walking up and down. Then there was silence. I concluded he had gone to his bedroom on the ground floor; and I fell asleep, lulled by the creaking of the timbers of the house.

I could almost imagine it swayed, pitched and tossed, as though recollecting its previous origin.

When I awakened the snow had ceased, and I hurried to dress and come down to the fire.

Mrs. Rogers was in the kitchen, in a pleasant aroma of coffee, bacon and eggs.

"Roger's not up yet, the lazy dog," I said to her. "I'll go and waken him."

I threw open the door boisterously, and stepped back in surprise. The room was empty. The bed was tumbled and tossed as though by a restless sleeper.

"Oh, Aunt Hannah!" I called quickly, the name came to my lips naturally. "Where's Roger. He's not in bed."

She came at once and took one look. The empty bed seemed to speak to her with an import so tremendous that for a moment she seemed ready to faint. Her eyes sought mine in terrified surmise.

All at once she looked upward with an expression of uncontrolled hate and shook her clenched fist at the ceiling.

"May God put a curse on her!" she cried, her voice rising to a vindictive shriek. "And damn her soul and body as she damned that poor lad and made him the slave of her; aye, a bond slave, even as old Silas Ames made slaves of her folk. She worked her magic on Roger, the black slut, even as was worked upon this house by her folk long ago."

"Mrs. Rogers—Aunt Hannah," I ejaculated, staring at her almost in terror, "was the girl he painted Joe Hinds' daughter?"

She nodded as though exhausted by her vehemence.

"Oh, my God!" I gasped. "And he didn't know till you told him. You don't think he's——" I couldn't say the terrible word.

"Where's the ship? What's he done with the ship he was a-making? It ain't there?" she asked in whisper.

And moved by a single impulse we both went to the front door. I threw it open. From the steps a line of footprints led across the white lawn of snow, led to the rocks and the sea. For a moment I had a strange hallucination of the senses, the breath of a spice-laden wind in my nostrils, the glare of a tropic sun, the sound of surge upon an African shore, the rich warm murmur of a voice of siren promise, a glimpse of a white-winged ship over the side of which leaned an eager face, and then as swiftly the vision faded.

I strained my eyes to the sea. A tiny speck drifted aimlessly on the glittering surface, and it came to me all of a sudden that it was Roger's little ship, masterless.

And though I knew, though I was as positive as if I had that instant read it in the book of fate that I would not find what I sought, I started toward the rocks, the shore and the sea of enchantment on which the body of Roger was being carried away from us; the empty shell of a soul which in its hour of agony had chosen death rather than surrender to a forbidden passion.

I turned once to shake my fist at the house of Marlowe, complacent in its vile serenity, bland in the centuries old cruelty which had driven my unhappy friend out to his death; and with tears in my eyes began to descend the desolate rocks.

The Kingdom of Dogs

Travelers in olden days brought back no accounts of extortionate hotel bills and encounters with avaricious storekeepers. Instead they returned with strange tales of mysterious peoples.

In Northern India, said one, lived a race of men with the heads and claws of dogs who communicated with each other by barking. Armed with bow and spear they could outrun the swiftest of animals. They were cave dwellers, and lived to a great age, perhaps because instead of applying water to their skins they used butter.

Like races existed in the legendary history of both hemispheres.

Even more wonderful is the Chinese story of the Kingdom of Dogs, where the men were barking dogs; but the females were women with speech who ate cooked meat, while the males ate it raw.

Nature by some convenient dispensation saw to it that the male children took after their fathers and the female after their mothers.

The tribe was broken up by a traveler who came upon it in the Great Desert. In pity for the women he agreed to their prayer that when he left he should leave behind him a trail of twigs to guide them to the outer world.

The Most Mysterious Happening in My Life

As related by AUGUSTUS THOMAS

(Dean of American Dramatists)

to

BIDE DUDLEY

"THE greatest mystery I ever encountered! That's what you want to hear about, eh?" asked Augustus Thomas, Dean of the American playwrights, as we sat in the living-room of his New Rochelle home one afternoon, not so long ago.

"That's right," I replied. "Was there a mystery that really impressed you?"

"There was, indeed," he continued, "and I still marvel when I recall it. However, the pronoun 'he' should be used in the place of 'it' for this mystery was a man. His name was Washington Irving Bishop, and his home was in Philadelphia. I knew him years ago—about thirty-five. Bishop was what is commonly called a mind-reader."

"A professional?"

"Yes! He earned his living by reading minds. He performed in theatres and halls and regular admission fees were charged those who came to observe his demonstrations. There were many people in those days who considered him a fakir, but they were wrong.

"I positively know he possessed a mysterious power because I was intimately acquainted with him; in fact, was once his advance agent."

"What sort of mysterious demonstrations did he give?" I asked.

"Let me tell you of one which occurred when I first met him," Mr. Thomas went on. "It was back in the late eighties. I found myself out of a job in St. Louis. Bishop was playing an engagement there and I learned his advance agent had quit. John Ritchie, well-known in the theatrical world, was his manager, and he offered me the job of going ahead of the mind-reader.

"Bishop knew nothing of our negotiations. In fact, it was immediately after Ritchie and I met that we went over to see him. He was seated in the lobby of his hotel and, as we approached, he gazed steadily into my eyes. Finally, before either of us had spoken, he said:

" 'So you want to be my advance agent, do you, Mr. Thomas?'

"I was astounded. 'Yes,' I replied, trying hard to avoid showing confu-

sion. 'How did you know, and where did you get my name?'

"'Never mind!' he replied, pleasantly. 'You suit Mr. Ritchie; therefore, you suit me; but you want too much money. We cannot pay $100 a week.'

"Again surprise gripped me. 'I haven't mentioned salary,' I protested.

"'But you had your mind made up to ask for that sum,' said Bishop. 'Seventy-five is all we can offer. Will you accept it? Ah, that's good! I like you and believe you will do excellent work.'

"He offered me his hand and I tried to take it. Deftly, however, he grasped my wrist.

"'You'll need some expense money in advance, wont you?' he said in a tone that indicated more the statement than the question.

"'I'd like to have about fifty,' I replied.

"'Yes, three dollars and thirty-three cents wont last long, will it?'

"He let go my wrist. I had just remembered that $3.33 was all I had. The idea came to me that maybe I hadn't counted right. I had a sort of a desire to catch him in an error, just to prove he wasn't infallible.

"I pulled my available funds from my pocket. They amounted to exactly $3.33. Immediately my curiosity turned to admiration for the man. I knew he was a marvel. He could be nothing else.

"'YOU'VE been reading my mind, Mr. Bishop,' I said. 'Why have you done it—just for fun?'

"Bishop shook his head slowly. 'There is no fun in it, young man,' he replied. 'It is a very great strain for me. But, since I realized you were to be my advance agent, I wanted you to believe in me.

"'Others may call me an impostor, but those associated with me in my work must not. Have I proven to you that I am genuine in my demonstrations of thought reading?'

"'You have, most assuredly,' I replied with emphasis. 'But,' I continued, 'how did you know my name was Thomas?'

"Bishop smiled again. 'That was easy,' he said. 'I had a double intake of mind on it. Both you and Mr. Ritchie were thinking as you approached of our introduction. The name *Thomas* was in both your minds. Simple enough, eh?'

"'*Simple* isn't the word,' I said. 'Let's make it *Amazing*.'

"'If you wish,' replied Bishop; whereupon Ritchie and I left him to go to the manager's room and talk over plans.

"Later I had numerous discussions with Bishop anent his unexplainable power. I once asked him how he did his mind-reading. He said he couldn't tell me, because he didn't exactly know. "'All I do,' he said, 'is put myself in a receptive condition and concentrate. At the moment my mind is in a state that might be called autohypnotic. The thoughts of others impress themselves on it in the form of word pictures. Now you know as much about my power as I do.'

"IN a Middle West city one time, Bishop was asked to try to reveal the identity of a murderer. The story the police had, concerned a burglar who had entered a home and shot a woman in her bed. Her husband, awakened by the report of the pistol, had grabbed for the man, but had failed to catch him.

"However, his hand had torn a button off the intruder's coat and this was in the possession of the police. Bishop asked that the husband be brought in. He also asked for the button.

"The man was summoned. He told Bishop the same story the police had heard. Bishop took hold of his wrist. The mind-reader had the button in his other hand. There was a moment of silence. Finally Bishop dropped the man's wrist and, in a quiet tone asked:

"'Why did you kill your wife?'

"'I didn't,' the other shouted, explosively.

"'And where is the suit from which you took this button—your old suit, I mean?'

"The man first frowned, then sneered. 'That's a silly question for a mind-reader to ask,' he said. 'If there is another suit of mine involved, you ought to know where it is. If you don't you're a big humbug.'

"'I know all about it,' replied Bishop quietly. 'It was burned by you in a bonfire out behind your barn. The rest of the buttons are in the ashes.'

"The man was led away protesting and denying. The police went to the barnyard— I went along—and found the remains of a fire. In the ashes they located several buttons of the sort the man had turned in. They were badly scorched, but the make and type were recognizable. The husband confessed and was sent to prison for life, I believe."

"Whatever became of Bishop?" I asked.

"Bishop overtaxed himself giving demonstrations, here in New York in 1889," replied Mr. Thomas. "The strain killed him. He died on a cot at the Lambs' Club. That ended my mystery—the greatest I ever encountered."

The eighth story of this series
will be told by

Douglas Fairbanks
and Mary Pickford

It will appear in our next issue—
out May 15

The Red Button

By JEAN ALLISTER

RUMOR had it that, with one exception, every man, woman and child in Payne County knew that the days of Sarah G. McCloud were numbered. The sole exception was Sarah G. McCloud herself.

At irregular intervals during the past six months word had come in from the Tennessee hills to the District Attorney of her condition, each report accompanied with the message that she would be up and about her detective work for the good of her county and the country at large "afore the next change o' the moon."

But many moons had passed since the witness chair in the dingy courtroom had been honored with the presence of this illiterate but uncannily shrewd aged mountain woman, whose erratic unchallenged evidence had tested my ability as court stenographer to the utmost.

In my mind, Payne County and Sarah G. McCloud were inseparable. That one could exist without the other seemed almost an impossibility.

There had never been a "killin'" or a "stealin'" in this particular county, or the adjacent county of Lee, that had not, by some remarkable coincidence, been eye-witnessed by this strange character.

Furthermore, the court records proved that her accurate and oft-times gruesomely detailed testimony had resulted in a conviction of the accused in every instance. It was her boast that the State paid for her yearly supply of salt pork in witness fees alone.

Her cleverness on the stand was common knowledge. I have known as many as fifty of her neighbors to leave their work in the fields and accompany their fetish to the county seat and sit for hours in the straight-backed court benches, their open mouths drinking in the gems of satire that fell from her snuff-stained lips.

True, on the last trial, Sarah G. McCloud had acknowledged the age of seventy-seven. But so strong was her vitality and so straight her back on that occasion, I never for one moment thought the monotony of the evidence given daily by lawyer-drilled witnesses, would no longer be broken by her unique and forceful method of testifying.

And yet, to such an extent had her personality fired my imagination and whetted my curiosity, I, myself, was sitting beside Mary, her daughter, on the backless board of a mule-drawn dirt wagon, climbing the hills of the elusive county of Payne on my way to her bedside.

THE silence of my companion, an angular, raw-boned mountain girl of about my own age, a silence maintained even while we drank spring water from our cupped hands, had somewhat dampened my enthusiasm for the ever changing patchwork of green scenery, and my back missed the comforting support of my typewriter chair.

Half regretting the impulsiveness that had been responsible for the long trip, I turned to Mary and asked:

"Will you please repeat your mother's message to me, Mary?"

A fluted white sun-bonnet that matched a belted mother-hubbard, hid the girl's face, but I saw her large, red hands tighten on the reins. In a monotonous tone of voice and without turning her head, she responded:

"Maw said I was not to return withou' ye."

"Yes, yes, I know. But the other part of the message, Mary. Are you quite sure your mother said the *red* button?"

"Uh-huh," Mary nodded, and added: "I showed ye the paper."

Somewhat relieved, I extracted from my purse the bit of brown meat paper that Mary had brought with her to substantiate her statements and gazed at the shaky cross penciled thereon, mute evidence of the feeble condition of Sarah G. McCloud.

Often had I seen her place this, her mark, at the foot of affidavits. But never had I witnessed a cross so poorly made.

Though unable to read or write, I could recall incident upon incident where hardened, cold-blooded attorneys had squirmed under the rebuttal of the aged woman's apt and cutting replies. Her eyes had seen much of the wrong side of human beings and her knowledge of their frailties had not been acquired between the covers of books.

But instead of feeling any inferiority over her illiteracy, she reasoned, "Wi' good eyes to see, what need's there to read?" and held her head higher than the learned judge himself.

Mary had inherited little or none of her mother's shrewdness and fortitude. But then, one would have to be more than commonly clever to measure up in a household of which Sarah G. McCloud was the head.

My mind kept reiterating—"The red button—the red button—the red button."

But I could not think of the red button without thinking also of the aged woman's far-famed "book." I had been privileged to see it several times.

Composed of leaves cut from white oilcloth and stitched through the center with red cord, this book was Sarah G. McCloud's method of recording her life in court. It never left her bosom day or night.

Each leaf covered one year. And upon the leaves had been sewed buttons; buttons of every size and color representing varied crimes to which she had been an eye-witness. A murder, and subsequent conviction as a result of her testimony, was always indicated by a black shoe button.

Time and again, during the luncheon period, had I sat spellbound in my little ante-room in the court house listening to Sarah G. McCloud tell, in her inimitable manner, of crimes committed before my time.

But her long fingers had always skipped one leaf. Midway in the book and containing a single, odd-shaped red glass button, in marked contrast to the more or less filled pages preceding and succeeding it, this leaf had aroused my curiosity to such an extent that I called her attention to the omission.

At first a quick blush and an angry snort had been my only answer. Finally, however, I succeeded in enacting from her a promise that on some future date I would be enlightened as to the significance of this solitary button.

And this morning Mary had come to the court house insisting that her mother wanted to see me, using the red button as bait, when I showed an inclination to postpone the visit.

Toward dusk, there rose before us twin hills thickly covered with brush

and trees and, winding in and out among the green, a dirt road was faintly visible. Mary pointed to them with her whip and nodded her head. I took this to mean we were nearing our journey's end.

A small village lay at the bottom of the second hill. Night was falling quickly and Mary sharply urged the mule forward. Halfway up the road, in front of a one-story and attic tumble-down dwelling, both sides painted with a popular liniment sign, the clumsy wagon was brought to a sudden stop.

"This be the place," Mary said curtly, jumping from the seat to the ground. "Ye can wash up on the stoop at the back. I'll feed ye after I come from the barn."

I descended slowly and walked along the dirt path to the rear of the house. Several pails of water stood on a low bench and above them hung dried gourd dippers. I washed in a tin basin that stood near and sat on the bottom step, where Mary found me. Very tired, very lonely, and quite a bit frightened, I followed her into the kitchen.

AFTER a meal prepared and served upon the kitchen table, Mary escorted me to the front room, in one corner of which was a wooden bed of great age containing all that remained of Sarah G. McCloud. The eyes alone were familiar. Her form had wasted terribly and the hands that lay outside the log-cabin-pattern crazy quilt, appeared clawlike.

This front room was as strange as its occupant. No curtains of any kind framed the two large windows, and the bareness of the wide-board flooring was relieved by several hooked rugs, crudely made, with no attempt at design.

But it was the walls themselves that held my attention. From floor to ceiling, practically their entire surface was covered with legal documents of every description, some of them yellow with age.

Copies of affidavits, copies of judges' decisions, summonses, tax bills and tax sales, deeds to property, letters from lawyers, etc., met the eye at every angle. And there she lay in the huge wooden bed, propped up by pillows, unable to read a line!

I greeted her and timidly sat in the rush-bottomed chair by the bedside.

"Howdy, young court lady," she replied. "Now, mind ye, ye're not to tell them lawyer folk back there in the courthouse I'm sick. 'Tis jus' this knee that's bad. I'll be up next moon."

I felt ill at ease and in a surprisingly short space of time we had covered everything: the health of the judge and the district attorney and other lesser lights in the court house; the verdicts in recently tried cases, and the prevailing price of salt pork. Sympathy she did not want. To my surprise, no mention whatever was made of the red button or her message to me.

While I searched my brain for a topic of common interest, she groped in the sleeve of her wrapper and produced a small snuff bag. By means of a much-chewed wooden brush, she then inserted some of the brown mixture beneath her upper lip.

Smilingly I recalled a number of trials, some of them covering crimes of death penalty magnitude, that had been held up while the State's star witness, who had abruptly stopped in the middle of her testimony, had her "bit o' nerve tonic."

As she straightened to replace the snuff bag, there fell from her bosom the badly rumpled oilcloth book.

I eagerly stooped and recovered the book from the floor and placed it into her waiting hands, thinking thus to remind her of the red button. Con-

stant contact with her body had imparted to the leaves a warm, fleshy feeling. With my best smile, I pleaded:

"Mrs. McCloud, will you please tell me the story of the red button now? Mary said you would and I . . ."

The head of Sarah G. McCloud jerked back sharply as she broke in:

"Mary! My Mary tolt ye that?"

"Yes. This morning when she brought your message."

And there was no doubting the genuineness of her surprise. A queer look of admiration came into the eyes that sought the kitchen doorway and her thin lips allowed themselves the shadow of a smile. Startled and wondering what lay at the bottom of the whole matter, I rose to my feet. But she halted me with a wave of her hand.

"No. Sit ye down. Sit ye down. So, Mary tolt ye."

HER mind seemed to be seeking for some cause as she gazed upon me with half-closed lids. Presently her hand began slowly to turn leaf after leaf of the oilcloth record and stopped midway in the book.

Grasping the red glass button in thumb and forefinger, she lay back on her pillow and, without preliminaries of any kind, commenced the tale in a reminiscent tone:

"This button's the story o' three people. Jim McCloud, Mary's brother, and younger than her by two years; Walt Brown, an orphan wi' a bad streak, brought up by his uncle, Page Brown, from the county o' Lee, and a chit o' a gal wi' brick-color hair by the name o' Hetty-May-Simmons, one o' the six belongin' to fat Flora Simmons, whose man died o' heart trouble.

"Now, there's nothin' new or strange in the way the bad feelin' between the two boys started. Jim and Walt were chasin' Hetty-May and she kept them both jumpin' like a bear trainer I seed once in a circus. But the worse quarrel o' the lot came the day o' the yearly barbecue.

"That day, Hetty-May strutted about proud-like in a new red velvet jacket, wi' an astrakan border and a row o' red buttons that reached from collar to hem. She took up wi' Walt and then wi' Jim, and then wi' Walt again, but when the sun set I knowed that Jim had won out and was to take her home.

"Out o' the corner o' my eye, I seed that Walt was drinkin' more'n was good fer him, and he was fightin' mad by the time the women started home and the men folk stamped out the fires that had roasted the pigs and sech. I sent Mary on ahead wi' the neighbors and stayed behin' to watch Jim.

"After a bit, my boy and Hetty-May walked toward the road, arm in arm, wi' Walt zigzaggin' after. I kept to the side out o' the light o' the moon and followed Walt.

"He came upon the two sittin' on the bench between the chicken-house and the old barn on Logan's ground right acrost the road from here. I hid by the lilac bush near the front stoop. Mad wi' the drink, Walt called Hetty-May a name that no man'll stand for wi' his fists open."

Sarah G. McCloud wet her lips with her snuff-smeared tongue and proceeded:

"I allus had a likin' for a fight. To stop one is wrong, for 'tis then that folks lose track o' their parlor tricks and show just what they be. Jim had got quite a bit o' my tongue waggin' —Mary, poor fool, none—and right proud was I o' the way he was holding up his end o' the scrap. But soon he took to swearin' and losin' his head. An' that be a bad sign.

"The better to hear, I crawled the length o' the lilac bush to the horse trough near the chicken-house and

lay on my stomach, listenin' to Hetty-May blubberin' and begging the two to quit and go home.

"Anyone could tell easy by the way she did her back hair that Hetty-May-Simmons was weak inside—like her mother. So mad was I, that I came near hollerin' to her to shut up and leave the two have it out, once and for all.

"Just then the moon picked out for me the shadow o' a man's fist and arm on the side o' the old barn. None o' the body, mind ye, just the fist and arm. An' a mighty mad-lookin' fist it was, too. Next, the shadow o' his other hand showed up near the first, and what I saw made me rub my eyes to be sure. Straight ahead out o' the fingers of this shadow was pointin' a pistol!

"From the arms, 'twas hard to tell who was who, 'cause both Walt and Jim had store coats on that night. But that pistol made me raise quick on my elbows, wonderin' if they was goin' to make darn fools o' themsel's.

"I could not help chucklin' at their impudence, and thinkin' how like a pitcher-show it all was wi' the side o' Logan's barn for the screen, when I seed Hetty-May's shadow jump afore the pistoled hand just as the shot cut the night an' set all the dogs abarkin' clear to the fork-road crossin'. Then the first hand grabbed the red jacket by the collar—Who's that?"

Interruption came in the form of Mary slowly opening the door and bearing in her hands a large dinner plate on which rested a brown crockery mixing-bowl full of some steaming mixture. Approaching the bed, she timidly held the bowl toward her mother and explained:

"Maw, this here's the beef tea that city doctor tolt me yer wus to have at this time o' day."

With a snort of disgust, her mother pointed kitchenward and fumed:

"Go out! An' take that warm dish out wi' ye. But, if ye feel ye'd like to be handy at all, fetch me a slice o' fried salt pork and a corn pone browned good afore the cinders, and some——"

"But, maw, he says yer stomach cannot take sech."

"My stomach'll take what my mind orders. If I have to die, it'll not be wi' a quart o' that slop inside me. Beef tea—bah! I'll say I do favor a cup o' strong tea at times, and a bit o' beef at others, but beef tea's neither. An' I'll not be experimentin' wi' a new taste at my time o' life. Take it out an' drink it yersel'. Ye need bracin' up a lot, Mary."

With a twitch at the corners of her mouth, she added:

"An', Mary, ne'er mind the napkin next time. The court lady knows well that creases o' napkins tucked under yer chin every day show no dust nor turn a yellow color. Put it back in the box wi' the other five that fussy school teacher sent ye."

As Mary sullenly left the room, Sarah G. McCloud threw up her hands in a gesture of futility and said in an apologetic tone:

"I ne'er in my life fancied the doin' of one thing that that there gal o' mine didn't think I oughta fancy another. But, she can make good corn pone, Mary can, and that goes a long way wi' the men folk in these parts. Now, where be I?"

"You said you saw the shadow hand grasp the girl's jacket by the collar," I quickly prompted, eager for a resumption and completion of the unusual tale.

UNLIKE most of the hill people surrounding her, this aged woman had no suggestion whatever of a darky accent to the endings of her words. She never pronounced "hear," "heah," but seemed to bite the *r's* off sharp and clear. Yet, at times, she drawled

her words beautifully, especially when talking in a sarcastic vein.

On several occasions, in the courtroom, so fascinated had I been with her method of speech on the witness stand, my fingers forgot to form the stenographic characters on the page of my notebook.

"Uh-huh," she nodded, "that be the place. Well, as I said afore, the first hand grabbed Hetty-May by the collar to keep her from slippin'. But she slipped down just the same. I got to my feet as fast as my bad knee would let me and started to run. At the corner o' the chicken-house, I seed the pistoled hand on the side o' the barn turn back on itsel' and another shot rang out.

"Folk were callin' to each other down the road and the windys in some o' the houses showed jumpy lamps. Quick I came up to the pile o' legs and feet, but, in the dark, could not make out which was which. Wi' my hands I pulled the top one off by the back o' his coat and turned him to the moon.

"It was Walt—Walt Brown, terribly drunk, wi' a smokin' gun in his hand, mumbling away—'That be my gal down there. He tried to take her from me. That's my gal—he tried to——'

"I pushed him aside and looked down. My Jim was lyin' awful still acrost the red jacket o' Hetty-May. But she was lyin' stiller. I knew then that the pair o' store shoes wi' the new fangled rubber heels Jim had bought on his last trip to town would have to be sold, and that Hetty-May had twisted her back hair into kid curlers for the last time.

"Walt dropt the pistol and came staggerin' near, still mumbling—'That there's *my* gal—he took *my* gal'—an' trying hard to pull Hetty-May from under. Once I seed his hand come away from her side as red as the jacket. 'Twas this made me call loud to the folk down the road.

"But afore they came—men swearin', brats screamin', lanterns swingin', dogs yelpin'—I lifted my boy offen her and laid him by hissel' on the grass.

"'Tis true that most o' the McClouds died wi' their shoes on, but no one afore Jim breathed his last acrost and on account o' a woman. Walt's eyes were blinded wi' the drink and seed nothing.

"Too many killings had come my way for me to feel much, and I would be tellin' a lie to say Jim was a good son to me or a good brother to Mary. But when I seed him lyin' there, not lookin' a bit like hissel' or his paw in the tight store clothes, I did feel sorta empty inside.

"Well," folding her hands about her book and settling back against the pillow, "there's not much more to that part o' the story. The men folk held Walt until the sheriff an' his wagon came and took him.

"I can still see the mother o' Hetty-May, barefoot, without her top teeth and wi' her hair in tissue-paper knots, screeching loud and tryin' to tear the eyes outa Walt wi' one hand and wi' the other folding the flannel nightgown about her fat sides like a the-a-tre coat. Mary had run out when she heard the yellin' and sat by Jim's head wiping her eyes on the hem o' her checkered apron.

"After a bit they all went away or were carried away—Walt, Hetty-May and her mother, and the dogs. The men folk asked to bring Jim home, but I tolt them I had managed my own affairs afore and could do so again. Alone, Mary and I looked at each other dumb-like and then down at Jim.

"All at onct from the top o' the second hill came the sound o' hymn-singing. Like a black ghost agin the sky, we seed Rat Quinn's half-

wit boy, Cyrus, leadin' his blind bull down the road.

"'Member now 'twas 'Onward, Christian Soldiers,' at the foot o' the bluff, but at the horse trough near Logan's barn, where he let the bull drink, the tune changed to 'Take me as I be.' I had need of Walt and called.

"An' in an hour, or maybe a little less, all that was left o' my Jim lay under the new mound betwixt his paw and my first man on the far side o' the stone hill, wrapped—store clothes, celluloid collar and all—in the plaid blanket Mary had put about her shoulders when she ran out. I'll say his face was still and quiet like, but I seed that his madness had shut tight one fist."

"But," I faltered unbelievably, "didn't you bring him home? Had you no undertaker? Was there no burial service—not even a coffin—nothing?"

Through half-closed lids, the old woman shrewdly glanced at me and continued, her voice plainly indicating pity at my apparent ignorance.

"Home? Undytaker? Service? Huh! 'Tis clear ye're not from these par's or ye'd heard long ago o' the one and only superstition o' the woman they call Sarah G. McCloud. Listen close. If a black cat crosses me on the road, I'll not even wink. I can spill salt all over the kitchen table and laugh, or cut my nails of a Friday. Ye can raise all the umbrellas ye please in my rooms. But there's something I allus feared and feared mightily."

She leaned forward and wagged her bony finger in my face, marking time with it to the staccato words:

"An' that's—the curse—put upon ye—if ye touch—or make straight—the limbs o'—a killed body."

REPLACING the book in her bosom, she straightened the bed covering and took up the thread of the story again.

"So, my young court lady, the bit o' ground on the far side o' stone hill where there's still space for Mary and me was the home we carried him to. The undytakin' business was done by Mary and the old plaid blanket.

"An' Crazy Cy, for the price o' Jim's overalls and the new pair o' store shoes, dug the grave and sung the hymns, keeping the beat o' the tunes wi' the shovel and hittin' his bull on the snout when the beast came too near the hole." A significant pause. "But, Hetty-May, they tell me, had a grand burial and it musta set her mother back a lot."

"What happened to Walt Brown?" I queried, trying not to show the disappointment I felt at the unsatisfactory ending.

"Walt? If ye'll dig out the papers in yer court house, ye'll find the part about Walt Brown. I tolt what I'd seen on the witness stand, and they could not prove me wrong. Walt, sober, 'membered little or none o' the shootin' and kept lookin' at me wi' big eyes and listenin' to my evidence like I was speakin' o' somebody else.

"Nor could he tell them how he happened to be holdin' Jim's pistol in his hands—for it was my Jim's gun, you know, that did the killin'—when I found him. But, they sent him up for life jus' the same and lots o' mothers wi' gals o' the flirtin' age slept easier when they heard the news. An' in the middle o' a page in my book I sewed a black shoe button."

"Black shoe button?" I exclaimed, puzzled. "Why, I thought this was the story of the red button."

Ere she could answer, a spasm of pain came over the pinched features and she pressed both hands tightly to one side. Thoroughly alarmed, I

ran to the kitchen for Mary and when the girl entered her mother said with difficulty:

"Quick! A gourd full o' spring water and two o' them pellets the doctor left. The box be under the bed. I flinged it there this mornin'. That stitch's come again."

Mary hastened to obey and her mother lay back exhausted for quite a while, after drinking the water. Nervously I rose to accompany the daughter to the kitchen, thinking that the aged woman would probably fall asleep if alone. But a voice from the bed halted me halfway to the door.

"No—no. Ye're not to go yet. I've not tolt ye the queerest part o' the whole business. Mary, pull the door tight behin' ye when ye go out."

I knew it was useless to argue with Sarah G. McCloud in her present condition, and reluctantly resumed my seat by the bedside. Without preliminaries of any kind, but in a much lower tone of voice, she continued:

"Some time after we laid Jim under ground, I was sittin' on the stump by the old cistern, thinkin' how hot it be for that time o' the season, and lookin' acrost the road at Logan's old barn. All of a sudden, the shadows I seed the night o' the killin' came back to me. I had ne'er given them a thought afore.

I figured this way and that way, but my figurin' allus came to the same end, which be—the shadow hand that grabbed Hetty-May by the collar belonged to the hand wi' the pistol, and they both belonged to the one that did the killin'. I also 'membered the pistoled hand turnin' back on itsel' and this started my mind along another track.

"Without waitin' to get my sunbonnet, I crost the wheat fields to the home o' Hetty-May's mother and visited wi' her a while. Ye've little interest in the things we talked about afore I finally got her to show me the red jacket o' Hetty-May.

"Sure enough, where the top red button had been yanked off was a torn hole. Hetty-May's mother was wipin' her eyes when I pulled off another button near the hem and put it in my apron pocket.

"That night I fidgeted and fidgeted in my bed and kept thinkin' and figurin' some more. About one o'clock I called to Mary to get out o' her bunk and come wi' me to Jim's grave and fetch the shovel along."

AT this point the aged woman removed the supporting pillow from her back and flung it to the foot of the bed. Pulling herself into a sitting posture, she questioned:

"An' do ye know what I found?" A pause. "Eh?" Her bony fingers dug impatiently into my knee as she repeated— "Eh?"

I drew my chair back from her reach and shook my head.

"Wait. I'll show ye."

To my astonishment, she slowly and laboriously lifted the crazy quilt from the wasted form and attempted to stand upon her swollen feet. She waved aside my protests and angrily turned upon me when I summoned Mary. The latter hurried in and tried to force her mother back into bed. With a strength of which I did not believe Sarah G. McCloud capable, she thrust the girl from her path and shouted:

"Ye hussy! Tellin' *me* at my age what to do. Get back there and trim the green lantern and see that the bowl's full o' oil and the glass clear. I'll be needin' it soon."

The force of habit was strong within Mary and she whimperingly obeyed. I stood by watching Sarah G. McCloud's shaky gnarled hands put on a pair of worn woolen stockings and red felt slippers. Next she pulled from the bed the faded over-

coat that had belonged to her second husband, Mary's father, and draped it about her frail form.

Several times I came forward to offer assistance, but she would have none of my help. Breath coming in quick gasps, she said:

"No, young court lady. When I can no longer help mysel', then it's time to fetch down the stone slab from the loft. The one I got for the price o' a drink from drunken Joe Cowan four years ago, wi' the date o' birth and time o' passing of his wife, Patience, in big letters on the front side.

"Carl Murvel, down the road apiece, has promised to smooth off the printin' when I am in need of it, for I could ne'er lie quiet, dead or alive, wi' a stone over my head wi' the name o' Patience on it. 'Cause patience is one o' the things my maw had little of and handed me less."

With a great effort and many groans she finally stood erect and held on to the back of the chair by the bedside for support. Her thin lips forming into a most determined line, she took a step or two forward and beckoned to me.

"We'll go the back way, in case this be one o' the nights Rat Quinn's Cyrus may be leadin' his bull down the hill. Cyrus, for all his singin' and dumbness, has mighty sharp eyes and he and his bull has run afoul o' me on several o' my tracks."

Mary, white of face, appeared in the doorway exclaiming in a frightened voice:

"Maw! Oh, maw! Get back to yer bed! Get back to yer bed!"

"Fetch me the lantern and stop yer snivelin'. You're your father's brat all over—scared to move to one side o' the road. Any fool can walk in the middle."

"But," protested Mary, twisting the bottom of her apron round and round in her hands, "where be ye goin'?"

Steady and unafraid came the answer:

"To the smoke-house. Fetch the lantern and lead the way."

I saw Mary's eyes widen, but something in her mother's face stopped any further argument. With a resigned air, the girl lifted a green stable lantern from the kitchen table and started for the back door, followed by the halting steps of her mothers and my own timid ones.

What a strange and weird procession that must have been. Mary, in the lead, swinging the lantern in one hand and making queer noises in her throat like a dog about to be whipped; Sarah G. McCloud, straggling white hair blowing in the wind and long, thin arms and skeleton hands protruding from the short sleeves of her dead husband's top-coat, a few steps behind, and myself, now thoroughly frightened, bringing up the rear.

To me it seemed as if the aged body were already dead and a pair of glowing eyes alone had risen from the old wooden bedstead in the front room and had walked out of the rear door of this dilapidated abode.

A statement made several years previously in the courtroom by a prisoner convicted on her testimony recurred to me; such statement being to the effect that "the eyes of Sarah G. McCloud would be seeing things long after her bones had rotted."

Down the narrow, beaten dirt path we Indian-filed to the old woman's pride and joy—a small but most modern smoke-house and the only one within a radius of miles. Mary stepped aside when she reached the door and held the light close to the keyhole.

The mother, panting heavily, fumbled in her bosom and drew therefrom a string, on the end of which

hung several keys. After a number of unsuccessful attempts, she finally succeeded in inserting one of them in the lock and pushing the door open.

A rancid odor of smoked meat wafted out upon us. Sarah G. McCloud entered first and pulled me after her. She then relieved her daughter of the lantern and, without another word, slammed the heavy door in the girl's face and locked it from the inside.

The flickering flame revealed to my gaze large pieces of pork and several hams suspended from the low ceiling by means of looped cord thrown over black iron hooks. Why had I been brought here and why the necessity of locking the door? I watched the aged woman's every move. Much as one would slap the back of a favorite horse, she struck each piece in passing, pausing at a comparatively fresh side of pork in the center of the room to say:

"This here's the bit I earned on that Quinn-Weber trial. Do ye 'member that one? It's smokin' up fine, isn't it? An' that"—pointing to a half-consumed ham—"is all that be left o' the Kane killin'—one-eyed Dan Kane that stuck the hay fork in the back o' his woman the year o' the heavy rains in Payne County."

And so on, piece after piece, until we reached the rear wall. Holding the lantern as high as her feeble strength would permit, in an entirely different tone of voice, she ordered:

"See that bit hangin' close to the wall in the corner there? Fetch it to me. If ye stand on this box"—kicking a low packing-box with one foot—"ye can make it easy."

MECHANICALLY I complied with her request and lifted the cord from the black hook in the ceiling. Taking the small smoked bit in my hand, I was about to step down from the box when the lantern's ray fell upon it. My blood ran cold and I gave vent to a piercing shriek of horror. A clutched and partly smoked human hand lay in my grasp!

I let it slip from my trembling fingers to the floor while she yelled in anger:

"Pick it up, ye fool! Pick it up and hold it here to the light!"

I could not move. She, herself, attempted to reach the gruesome object, but the pain in her limbs prevented her. Her eyes glowed at me and her lips flung fearful oaths in my direction.

In actual fear of the frenzied woman before me, I mustered up sufficient courage to stoop and grasp the end of the cord by which the hand had hung from the ceiling and gingerly held it out toward her.

The close atmosphere of the small room and the smell from the hanging pieces of meat began to nauseate me but, at that moment, I did not dare make any suggestions or attempt to escape. Moreover, the movements of Sarah G. McCloud held me spellbound.

First, she pulled over the packing-box and seated herself thereon. Next, she silently motioned to me to take the lantern from her hand. I could see her chest rise and fall with her labored breathing as she laid the smoked hand across her knee and attempted to force open the stiffened fingers. To secure a better purchase she had placed the loop in the cord about one foot.

"Come near," she tersely commanded. "An' lift the light."

The sputtering of the flame caused her to cry out in rage as she dropped the hand to her lap and examined the wick.

"That she-devil, good-fer-nothin' chit! She forgot to fill the bowl! Hold it near, quick now, and look!"

I bent closer. She finally managed to spread all the fingers but one. In-

to the palm of the hand—which had not as yet been smoked and which looked terribly alive—this one finger was pressing something with a terrific force.

"Lower," she further commanded. "I'll not be able to keep them back much longer. Look sideways and ye'll see it."

Just then the light picked out something between the tip of the finger and the center of the palm. I sank to my knees at her side and peered at the object. Finally I made out an exact duplicate of the odd red button that had so aroused my curiosity in Sarah G. McCloud's oil-cloth book.

"But"—I faltered, moistening my dry lips and rising to my feet—"whose hand is that?"

"Uh-huh—I thought ye'd be coming to that afore long. That's the hand o' my Jim. An' it was 'cause I feared some other body might be smart enough to think the same as mysel' about the killin' o' Hetty-May-Simmons that sent me out to open his grave."

"Your Jim!" I interrupted, suddenly realizing the significance of the red button. "Then it was your Jim who ripped the button from the collar of the girl's coat trying to hold her up after she had flung herself in front of the pistol in his other hand and was shot."

Recalling the aged woman's former statement that she had seen the shadow hand containing the pistol turn back on itself when the second shot rang out, I excitedly added:

"And your boy killed himself! Your Jim killed himself! But"—hesitatingly—"you said you testified against Walt Brown and that . . ."

"The button was wedged so tight in Jim's closed fist, I could not budge it," calmly continued Sarah G. McCloud as if I had never spoken, "so I sent Mary back to the house for the cleaver."

"The cleaver!" I exclaimed aghast, at the same time mentally picturing this nerveless, masculine woman and her spineless daughter stealthily going to the grave on the side of stone hill in the dead of night.

"The cleaver," she dryly repeated. "Choppin' heads offen so many tough hens nicked the blade some, but I carried away wi' me that night the only evidence agin my boy. An' I'll say I've worked harder many a time over a ham bone. But that white-livered Mary o' mine blubbered like a two-year old when I made her wrap it up in her checkered apron. That gal puts more stock in her nerves than in the McCloud court record.

"The next mornin' I changed the black shoe-button on the page o' my book to a red one, the one I pulled offen Hetty-May's jacket mysel'."

The old woman paused and began chuckling to herself. From one sleeve she extracted her little bag of snuff and commenced to stir slowly the much-chewed brush into the brown powdery mixture. In a drawling tone of greatest satisfaction, she concluded:

"An' no one'll ever guess what become o' the top button offen Hetty-May's red jacket—the jacket wi' the astrakan border she was so proud o'—and no one can prove me a liar on the witness stand—and no one can ever tell about Walt . . ."

SUDDENLY she stopped short, her mouth agape, and the bag and brush fell from her trembling fingers. Fear leaped into the blazing eyes.

Realization must have come to her at that moment of my ability to broadcast her secret and prove her testimony a fraud. For once in her sordid life, Sarah G. McCloud had thrown caution to the winds, and

completely forgotten who I was and what I represented.

With a hideous gesture she rose to her feet and came toward me. Still grasping the lantern tightly in one hand, I shrank back out of reach of the clawing hands. But she came straight on.

My back felt the support of the rear wall of that small smoke-house at the same instant my right shoulder cringed from the imprint of her long-nailed fingers. The loathesome dead hand was then dangled before my bulging eyes and, in a voice hoarse with emotion, she cried:

"Swear by this ye'll never tell! Swear it, quick!"

I tried to answer in the negative but my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. With a vicious jerk at my shoulder and a contemptuous "Bah!" she turned from me and resumed her seat on the box, muttering the while:

"Well, my young court lady, tell or not tell as ye please. Words are of little use without proof. An' no white-collared lawyer man'll ever hold up my boy's hand as 'Exhibit-A,' or 'Exhibit-B' for gaping fools to stare at. No, siree!" A short pause. "Gosh! the hands o' the dead be far stronger than the livin'. But then, Jim allus was a stubborn un."

Curious as to what had prompted such language, I cautiously took a step or two forward and held the light out in the direction of the packing box. With every ounce of strength she possessed, Sarah G. McCloud was endeavoring to release the red button from the pressure of the stiffened finger.

Blue lips tightly compressed, she braced herself with her swollen feet and the exertion brought hectic spots to the sunken cheeks. Angered at her repeated failure, she finally threw the hand to the floor and stamped upon it. But the button seemed to mock her and to turn her anger into livid rage.

She stooped with difficulty and recovered the hand but, as she straightened, a moan of pain escaped her. With her mind and eyes functioning in perfect order, the weakened condition of her body infuriated her.

Striking her knee in contempt and shaking her head significantly, she boasted:

"Huh! It'll take more'n a sore leg and a bit o' smelly smoked flesh to get the best o' Sarah G. McCloud. An' no mite o' a red button belongin' to Hetty-May-Simmons'll stand in my way, neither."

But her second effort proved as futile as the first. She had forgotten my very existence. Losing all patience, and looking more beast than human with her sparse gray hair straggling over her face, the aged woman then tried to dismember her son's hand, finger for finger, tearing and twisting it brutally. To me, it was a mutilation of some suffering living thing and I sprang forward to save it.

But she was quicker than a flash. With an animal-like cry of fury, her bony fingers found my throat and tightened. The lantern dropped from my hand and the almost dry wick sputtered once or twice and then went out altogether, the sides of hanging meat assuming ugly ghost-like forms in the last bit of flame.

My senses began to reel and I could scarcely breathe. Long forgotten incidents in my life passed before my eyes in an endless procession and the roar of the sea sounded in my ears.

Suddenly the fingers about my throat relaxed and became icy cold. My breath came easier. With a peculiar throaty rattling noise, the head of Sarah G. McCloud fell forward on my chest and lay still.

I knew then that she was dead. Struggling out of her grasp, I tried desperately to get a grip upon myself while I felt the aged body sag and fall at my feet—a heap of bones covered with taut skin.

A flash of heat lightning though the window in the roof showed me a glimpse of the huddled form, head thrown back as if the neck were broken and a strand of stringy hair lying across the protruding snuff-smeared tongue. But it was the eyes that held me rooted to the spot. They *lived!*

The eyes of Sarah G. McCloud lived and lit up the room for several minutes after her body had stiffened! I could not get away from their baneful influence. Scream after scream issued from my lips and my subconscious mind began to pray.

FROM far off I seemed to hear the voice of Mary urging me to open the *door* from the inside; that her mother had the only key and that she, Mary, was powerless to come to my aid. No matter the cost, I must secure the keys from the neck of the dead woman and get out.

As many as four times I touched her clothing, only to fall back in terror. The fifth time my groping hand came in contact with a string.

With a feeling of great relief, I rose to my feet and hysterically called to Mary to cease her pounding; that I had the key and would be with her in a few minutes.

Turning in the direction of the heavy door, I felt my way carefully between the pieces of hanging meat, my fingers quickly moving to the end of the string and the keys. Suddenly my limbs refused to carry me another step and I began to sway.

In the darkness, I had picked up the cord that held the torn and twisted hand of Jim McCloud!

With loathing I thrust the thing from me. Then a blessed faintness came to my rescue and cut short my shriek of horror.

I CAME to, fully dressed, in Mary's bunk with a corn shuck mattress beneath me and no pillow. Presently Mary entered bearing in her arms my hat and coat and purse. But this was a new Mary.

Gone was the air of inferiority she had been accustomed to assume in my presence and gone, too, the apologetic look. She seemed taller and her shoulders had lost their droop, as if the burden that had weighed them down for so many years had suddenly been removed.

Laying my things on the foot of the cot, she tersely said without greeting of any kind:

"Logan's boy, John, is to drive ye back to town as soon as ye drink yer coffee?"

"Your mother?" I questioned breathlessly, ignoring her statement.

"She's passed."

"And the hand?" I whispered, raising myself to a sitting posture.

"What hand?"

The blank expression on the girl's face was worthy of Sarah G. McCloud herself. I knew I would get little or no information from her and knew also that I was expected to leave at once. I dressed quickly but declined the coffee. But I could not leave that house without relieving my mind of one thing. Reaching the front door, I turned upon Mary:

"That other boy—what was his name? Walt—Walt Brown. He must be released, Mary."

"Walt? Oh, be that what's worryin' ye. Didn't maw tell ye? The years o' heavy drinkin' gutted his lungs so bad he died in jail a few months after they put him in."

And that was all. The secret of Sarah G. McCloud would be buried

with her and guarded jealously by her daughter, who was literally pushing me out of the house.

Furthermore, I felt certain that the district attorney, in view of the aged woman's unchallenged court record for telling the truth, would put down my version of the crime as the hallucinations of a dying person.

I passed the quiet and wide-eyed hill people lining the path and entered the conveyance awaiting me, seating myself at the side of the overalled driver who started the horse immediately.

We had advanced as far as the bottom of the first hill when a peculiar rasping sound caused me to look ahead. In front of a log cabin sat a bearded mountaineer wielding a long black tool. As we came near I saw that he was effacing the name of Patience from the stone slab that Sarah G. McCloud had purchased from "drunken Joe Cowan for the price o' a drink."

Egyptian Mystery

In the Orient, the past and future are read in a tray filled with sand, or in a bowl containing ink, which becomes the magic mirror.

Lane, who edited the Arabian Nights and wrote several books on Egypt, wanted to test this last mode of divination. He consulted a local magician, who began by writing forms of invocation on slips of paper and burning them in a charcoal brazier. He then said he required the services of a boy who had not attained puberty.

To avoid deception, Lane sent his servant to pick up an urchin at random out of the street. The boy was told to hold out his cupped hand, and the palm was filled with black ink, into which he was told to stare and report what he saw.

The boy, after a time, reported several matters known only to Lane. The magician then said Lane could ask for the portrait of anyone, living or dead. Lane suggested Lord Nelson, and the boy, who could not pronounce the name and said he did not know the man, to Lane's astonishment gave a faithful picture of the admiral, with but this error, that the missing arm was the left one.

He asked the magician if the boy saw objects as if they were before his eyes, or in a mirror, and was told—as in a mirror. The error of the arm was thus explained. The boy saw Nelson's missing right arm as his left.

Other portraits, one of a living man in England, were described with amazing accuracy, and Lane confessed he was baffled by the mystery.

No Defense Whatever

By VICTOR LAURISTON

A TWO PART STORY—PART I

CHAPTER I.

BRIEFLESS BRESSEY

ALLAN Bressey regarded the bright newness of his law office with a hard smile.

He always smiled, did Allan Bressey; but, contrary to the adage, the world did not smile with or on him. Indeed, for all the notice the world took of Allan Bressey, he might have been as non-existent as his law practice.

If his immediate surroundings gleamed with self-advertising newness, it was for lack of that wear and tear which, in a law office, betokens prosperity.

The April sun, dipping lower and lower, shot golden bars through the office windows. That golden light made the office seem brighter still, the furniture newer, the typewriting machine, the desks, the filing cases more than ever unscratched.

It touched Minnie Derwent's hair to a more pronounced auburn.

Allan Bressey had hopefully engaged Miss Derwent as stenographer last September, when he first furnished his office and hung out his shingle. Now, in April, he still waited for his brief.

A few petty police court cases had come his way, mostly drunks and vagrants, without the wherewithal to interest lawyers of higher repute. A few old friends among Mornington store-keepers had entrusted Bressey with their uncollectible accounts. A disproportionately small amount of conveyancing had fallen to his lot.

But, after eight months, Allan Bressey still waited for the big court case destined to establish him professionally in the eyes of Mornington.

He could have taken a salaried position with an established law firm. He might have done so, but for Dawson Reddick's example.

Dawson Reddick, three years before, just out of law school, had declared, "I'll never be anything but my own senior partner." Dawson Reddick had opened a sumptuous office and had made a vast noise in Mornington.

Today, Dawson Reddick, with a rapidly growing practice, had a dependable junior to look after the details that slipped through his own careless fingers.

Bressey knew he had failed where Dawson Reddick had succeeded because he was, in all respects, the antithesis of Dawson Reddick. Quiet, modest, careful, exact, well-versed in his law, scrupulous—meritorious qualities which, alas, did not help a

young lawyer to sell his talents to a litigious public.

He blinked at the office clock. It, too, registered newness: also 5:30.

"Sorry I kept you so late, for nothing," he told Minnie Derwent. "We'll call it the end of a perfectly futile day."

The girl's slim forefinger touched her lips.

"Sh! Someone's coming!"

Her nimble fingers flew over the typewriter keys. Bressey, hunched over his glistening desk, with a pile of law books and papers for setting, immersed himself in a brief.

The typewriting was mere finger-practice, the brief a made-up dummy, but the ensemble looked professionally prosperous.

"Gee-whillikens!" boomed a genial voice. "Don't miss the Cecil B. DeMille monumental production of Briefless Bressey pretending to be Dawson Reddick!"

With a tragic smile, Bressey dropped his pitiful pretence.

"Sit down, Reddick," he invited. "You may go, Miss Derwent—ah—when you have finished those letters."

There were no letters. Bressey merely tried to save his face before this big, booming, bumptious confrère whose patronage always made him feel insignificant and whose blatant success emphasized his own failure.

"That stunt," scoffed Reddick, "is mouldy with age. Why don't you originate something? Then, maybe, you'd put things over like I do."

ALLAN Bressey, smiling his habitual apologetic smile, realized he would never dare the stunts Dawson Reddick not merely dared, but got away with.

Reddick, smoking a cigarette, jerked out a surprising question:

"D'you want me to throw a big case your way?"

Allan Bressey blinked, uncomprehending. Dawson Reddick could spare him more than one big case, and still be busy.

But Bressey knew Dawson Reddick did not throw big cases into the laps of impecunious lawyers.

Dawson Reddick, at all times and seasons, looked sedulously to the interests of a certain individual he regarded with supreme affection. To wit: Dawson Reddick.

"Well?"

"You mean it?" gasped Bressey.

"Anyone can see, Al, why you're a flivver. Wake up, man. When a kind friend throws opportunity your way, grab and hold tight."

Allan Bressey determined he would grab and hold tight any real opportunity. But Dawson Reddick throwing a big case his way? Incredible!

"What is this case?" he cautiously ventured.

"I'll not explain till you say yes or no; except this—the case came to me because the people felt I was the only lawyer in Mornington capable of handling it. It'll be a *cause celebré*—enormous advertising for you, and sure pay, whether you win or lose."

"Then why not keep it yourself?"

Bressey desperately cogitated.

"Yes, I'll take it." Then, in sudden suspicion, "Wait a minute, though. Civil or criminal?"

"Too late, Al. The bargain's made. You take the case. You'll want to wiggle out, of course, but you wont have time before the trial."

"You mean, I'm to defend Mary Galt?"

Bressey contemplated his predicament with something like horror. The Crofton murder was the biggest sensation in Mornington's history. The defence of Mary Galt would ad-

vertise her lawyer far and wide. Yet Bressey had a young lawyer's eagerness to be on the winning side of his first big case; and here his client's guilt was too inexorably proven.

Reddick callously regarded him:

"You seem hardly to appreciate my kindness?"

Bressey burst forth desperately:

"What possible defence could I offer?"

"That," calmly responded Reddick, "is what I've been mulling over these two months. Poor Mrs. Galt metaphorically crawled at my feet begging me to defend the girl. She overpersuaded me. I felt, 'I've always won. I can win even this case.'

"But the more I studied it, the surer I saw a break in my winning streak.

"Then I thought of a way out. You were the way. Here, I told myself, is a deserving young man who has studied hard. He needs publicity, and this case will advertise him.

"Al, I've been plugging for you these three weeks with Mrs. Galt, telling her I wished I could get you; that I'd feel sure of an acquittal if you'd share the defence, but you wanted all or nothing, and you might be hard to get because you'd always refused to take court cases. She's in my office now."

"Then I must see her."

"No hurry, Al. A prolonged spell of waiting will impress her with your importance and prove what a devilish hard time I'm having to get you to take the brief. Ten minutes wait ought to stand you an extra thousand in fees."

BRESSEY paced the floor. Whether or not he impressed Mrs. Galt he did not care. What he did realize was his own entire inadequacy for the hideously hopeless task of defending this proven murderess.

"See here, Reddick, can't you suggest something?"

"If I'd seen the slightest toe-hold anywhere, I'd have tackled the precipice myself." Reddick smoked, quite complacent. "But you—"

"If *you* can't see any defense, what can I do?"

"D'you want a straight answer?"

"Yes. What can I do for Mary Galt?"

"Nothing. Mary Galt is as good as dead, right now. In the face of all that evidence, the most corrupt jury in the world couldn't be bribed to acquit her. But, see here, Al, some lawyer is going to take her mother's money for going through the motions of defending her. You might as well have the money.

And losing wont hurt you like it would hurt me. People expect me to win, even where my client's saturated with guilt; but you're just a kid. You'll get credit for a game fight."

He lowered his voice.

"Don't imagine, Alan, I pass up any case solely because it's hopeless. It just so happens I have a—ah— retainer that *might* conflict. Even *I* must show a little regard for legal etiquette."

He beamed self-approval.

"I'll admit you're up against it, Al. Hard. Your pretty client halts this car on Main Street, yanks open the door, and shoots a respectable and God-fearing citizen through the head in sight of a score of witnesses.

"Then, of course, she goes into premeditated hysterics. No hint of insanity to base a dementia plea, if our Ontario courts would listen to it, and they wont.

"There's motive for killing, but not enough to justify it. After all, the law wont let you shoot a man just because he puts your mother's money into a worthless mine. I suppose, though, you'll have to plead justifica-

tion. That, and the feminine appeal, is all the defense you have."

"The feminine appeal!" exclaimed Bressey, bitterly. "Women treating their sex as a license to kill! If there's anything I've detested, it's that. And now—"

Now, just such a woman, inexorably guilty, criminal to the core, depended on his puny and reluctant efforts for escape from the noose. And the noose, to his way of thinking, was fully earned, and inevitable.

A new thought brought him a queer sinking feeling:

"But the—the counsel work?"

Reddick regarded his young confrère with supreme amusement.

"Handle it yourself, like I do." He meditated. "Oh, I know how you feel, Al. You're a bit timid about court work. Well, as it happens, I ran into Mossop, K. C. in Toronto last week. I felt him out—"

Bressey glowed. If to handle so difficult a case was a huge responsibility, to be associated with E. Mossop, K. C. was a rare honor.

"I'll call Mossop tonight on long distance and tie him up for you. Just one word of warning. Don't go near Mossop. Don't pester him with letters. He'll come to Mornington the night before the trial, meet you at his hotel, glance through the brief with you, then lock himself in his room with the brief and a bottle of Scotch.

In the morning, the Scotch is all gone, and Mossop, K. C. knows absolutely nothing except your case, and he knows all there is to know about *that*. Touchy old blister, but—he's saved six murderers in succession, four of them guilty as can be."

Reddick got up.

"Now, let's go. I'll introduce you to Mrs. Galt. Tell her, right off the bat, you're too infernally busy to touch the case. Then I'll argue and you'll yield—reluctantly. Then we'll go over to the club, you and I, have dinner, play a few games of billiards, and go over the case together. After that, you've two short weeks to get things into shape for the trial, and for Mossop, K. C."

Reddick sighed.

"Boy, you're a darn fool not to handle the counsel work yourself and keep the Galt money in Mornington."

CHAPTER II.

A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

ALLAN Bressey lacked the nerve to pose before fluffy Mrs. Galt as the brilliant young lawyer who, yielding to Dawson Reddick's insistent plea, graciously undertook her daughter's defense.

Such a pose might suit Dawson Reddick; but Allan Bressey contented himself with a strictly business-like and decidedly sketchy reference to the case.

Serious detailed discussion must come later. What little Mrs. Galt told him confirmed the impression he got of an impulsive, quick-tempered girl guilty of an almost unpremeditated murder.

"Yet," mused Bressey, "she must have premeditated the killing to this extent—she secured a revolver beforehand and waited for Crofton's car."

Mrs. Galt told Bressey just one thing more—that Samuel B. Crofton had taken $20,000 to invest for her and had put it into Megantic Silver, a Cobalt wildcat, which promptly went into liquidation.

A good many people in Mornington had, it seemed, lost money through S. B. Crofton & Company. For old Samuel B. Crofton, white-haired, portly, benevolent-appearing, highly regarded by many earnest and goodly folk, was to those who knew him best a shrewd financial trickster.

Financial trickery, though, could not justify murder.

"I'll do my best for your daughter, Mrs. Galt," Bressey told the woman in parting.

At which Reddick scoffed as, a moment later, they crossed to the Mornington Club.

"That's old stuff, Al! For God's sake, put on a new record. This mid-Victorian modesty doesn't go in our age."

"Why, what should I have told her?" innocently demanded the younger lawyer.

"You should have told her you'd knock Prosecutor Kergin for a row of ash-cans. Even that is ancient, but it's modern compared with your line."

At the club, Bressey was eager to plunge into the evidence. But Dawson Reddick insisted on eating, though his confrère found no appetite whatever. He clamored for billiards, though Bressey never played worse or lost more disastrously.

Finally, though, they sought a secluded corner of the club.

"What have we here?" asked Bressey, as Dawson Reddick opened his brief-case.

"Nothing of much use," frankly rejoined Reddick. "Kergin has already proved his case by a cloud of witnesses. I don't mind the girl killing Crofton, but she was a fool to shoot him on Main Street in front of a crowd of people. As for this dope, Collinson got it together. I honestly don't know what's in the brief; hadn't time to run through it all."

COLLINSON was Reddick's partner, a careful, mediocre lawyer of uncertain age. Careful Collinson had, it seemed, secured all the newspaper clippings concerning, not merely the murder itself, but the failure of Megantic Silver and Crofton's supposed interest in that luckless enterprise.

"Collinson attended the inquest for Miss Galt," explained Reddick. "Rather bungled it, too, but I had to be in Toronto."

There was no stenographic report of the inquest. Collinson, in addition to the newspaper reports, had obtained a copy of the coroner's disjointed *precis* of the evidence.

"What defense did you contemplate?" anxiously asked Bressey.

Reddick shrugged his shoulders.

"Let's see what we have here."

The methodical patience with which Bressey insisted on reading every word and line of this material, and getting everything in exact chronological order, annoyed Reddick. Reddick's methods were habitually sketchy, even if his results were phenomenal.

"Step on the gas, Al," he contemptuously urged. "I've a poker game waiting for me."

Allan Bressey had on the tip of his tongue some biting words about poker chips and human lives. He suppressed them, merely saying with a disarming grin:

"You wont play poker till you've finished this."

He placed the coroner's *precis* and the Mornington Star report side by side.

"Rather lengthy," he commented.

"Sure. Prosecutor Kergin and Coroner O'Neill both insisted on tracing Crofton from the C. N. R. depot to Main Street, where he was shot. And Collinson, the blundering, conscientious fool read that chauffeur's evidence!"

Crofton's chauffeur, Peter Lane, the first witness at the inquest, told of meeting the 8:15 westbound. Mr. Crofton was returning from Toronto, where he had spent three days on mining business, and had arranged

beforehand for Lane to meet him and drive him to his apartment.

Lane drove the red landaulet as far as Main Street when, two blocks distant from Crofton's apartment, Miss Galt signalled from the curb. Lane stopped the car.

Miss Galt ran out from the curb, flung open the door, and shot Crofton. Lane at once jumped down, and, seeing the revolver in the girl's hand, snatched it from her.

"Did she resist?" blundering Collinson had asked; to which Lane had replied:

"No. She seemed dazed, and next minute went into hysterics."

To Collinson's question, had he actually seen the shot fired, the chauffeur explained that the car was of the landaulet type. The chauffeur's compartment was separated from the passengers by a glass partition with a curtain, which was down. Crofton used a speaking tube to communicate.

"I see nothing blundering in that line of cross-questioning," commented Bressey.

"Huh!"

The newspaper report continued:

Mr. Collinson: So, when you say Miss Galt shot Crofton, you are merely guessing?

The witness grew belligerent: "Who else could do it?"

Mr. Collinson: When Miss Galt signalled, did you ask Mr. Crofton whether you should stop?

Witness: No, sir. I knew he'd done business for Mrs. Galt, and—

Mr. Collinson: What sort of business?

The witness showed some hesitation: "Investing, sir," he at length responded.

Mr. Collinson: In worthless stocks, eh?

Prosecutor Kergin here objected to the question, and, after a heated argument, the objection was sustained by the coroner.

"What's wrong about that?" demanded Bressey.

"What's wrong? Go on, and see how the blundering fool simply emphasizes Kergin's case."

THE blundering fool, as Reddick termed his careful partner, had laboriously taken Chauffeur Lane over the entire ride from the C. N. R. depot on the outskirts of Mornington to Main Street. The red landaulet had, it seemed, halted at the Hampton Avenue crossing just outside the depot yards till the passenger train pulled out.

Just beyond the C. N. R. viaduct, where the pavement dipped, Crofton had whistled up the tube, asking Lane to slow the car to give him a chance to see how the knitting mills' addition was progressing.

"Did you halt the car there?" asked Collinson.

"No. I merely slowed. Joe Sully, the watchman upstairs, he yelled to me."

"The one actual halt," commented Bressey, "was at the C. N. R. crossing. But . . ."

"What bees," demanded Reddick, "are buzzing in your busy brain?"

"Is there," suggested Bressey, "a chance of suicide?"

Reddick laughed.

"Collinson," he bitingly commented, "contrived to negative that."

Collinson had questioned Lane as to Crofton's demeanor at the depot. Crofton had never seemed more cheerful. He was exultant over having put over a deal at Toronto that gave him control of the Delorme mine.

Tom Shedd also negatived the suicide theory.

"Uncle Crofton was healthy and cheerful," testified Shedd.

Shedd had been called primarily as a witness to the shooting; though he had not actually reached the scene till the body was being lifted from the landaulet under the coroner's direction.

Shedd was Crofton's nephew and partner, a dapper young mining engineer, and popular in Mornington.

"Nice chap," observed Reddick.

Collinson, despite Kergin's vigorous objection, had tried to probe the mining stock deal between Crofton and Mrs. Galt. Shedd knew nothing of the details, except that Mrs. Galt had instructed Crofton to put her $20,000 into Megantic Silver.

The newspaper report proceeded:

Mr. Collinson: A hopeless wildcat.
Witness: I didn't think so. I got nipped on Megantic myself.

Police Chief Clive, testifying to the arrest, put in a .38 calibre revolver as an exhibit. Five chambers were loaded, one empty. Crofton had been shot in the forehead, a little to the left, the side nearest the door Miss Galt had snatched open.

Collinson had laboriously questioned Clive as to what he found on searching the car. Clive had imperturbably produced the empty cartridge and a few red elastic bands. One of the bands were broken. Three, including the broken band, were on the floor of the landaulet; the fourth hung on the inside handle of the door.

Again the newspaper report became verbatim:

Mr. Collinson: What papers did you find in the car?
Witness: None.

Bressey glanced up from the report, his eyes agleam.

"That looks like something, Reddick. Here are four red elastic bands. The band hung on the inside handle was plainly put there while Crofton examined some papers. Where did the papers go? Were there papers on the body?"

Reddick grinned disconcertingly:

"Trust Collinson to probe that mare's nest."

Collinson had. Clive declared he found no loose papers. To further questioning, Clive had added that he found some traces of cigarette ashes on Crofton's coat and on the red mohair upholstery of the car seat. He had found a cigarette stub, not in the car, but on the pavement close by, where it might have fallen when the body was lifted out.

Careful Collinson must have examined the cigarette stub, for he had meticulously drawn on the edge of his brief a copy of the gilt monogram in Gothic capitals, plainly indicating a special brand made for some individual of select tastes. The initial letter was a *D;* the second might be either a *C, E* or *G,* or perhaps a *T.*

"What do you make of that?" Bressey asked Reddick.

"I guess Pete Lane had been taking out some private parties while Crofton was away," said Reddick easily. "The initials aren't Crofton's; and, anyway, Crofton hated cigarettes."

Bressey knew that. Crofton had been, in his goodly time, president of an anti-tobacco league. He would have objected strenuously to anyone else smoking in the closed car, let alone smoking himself.

WITH a sinking heart Bressey determinedly plodded through the evidence. Kergin had been pitilessly thorough.

Long after he had established an overwhelming *prima facie* case, he continued to put in witnesses—actual witnesses who, standing on Main Street, had seen Mary Galt signal the car, snatch open the door and fire the shot; other witnesses who, turning when they heard the shot, had seen Mary Galt standing with the revolver in her hand.

"Miss Galt," commented Bressey, "did not testify?"

"Even Collinson," retorted Reddick, "wasn't fool enough to put *her in* the box."

Bressey laid aside the last of the evidence. A long silence followed.

"What defense is there?" demanded Bressey.

Dawson Reddick responded with a careless laugh.

"No defense whatever. Oh," grinning pitilessly, "dementia, which in this barbarous country, even with a pretty girl, amounts to no defense."

Bressey got up.

"In the morning," he commented shakily, "I'll see Miss Galt."

BRESSEY that night filed a night-letter to Gordon Cragge at Toronto. In his own law school days Cragge had been a personal friend, and was now the very much junior partner of a brokerage house specializing in mining stocks. After much cogitation Bressey evolved this comprehensive message:

Please write me within week fullest possible details of following: Organization, operation and failure of Megantic Silver. Mornington stockholders and holdings, especially S. B. Crofton, Thomas Shedd and Mrs. Atherly Galt. From whom were Mrs. Galt's holdings transferred? Also details of Crofton's recent mining transactions and business connected with Crofton's visit to Toronto late in February. Fullest possible information urgently needed.

It was a considerable order. But Cragge had always been aggressive, not to say a nosey, young fellow. Trust him to dig up the facts if he did not know them already.

A week would give Cragge ample time, and would allow one more week to organize the information, secure corroboration where necessary, and get the brief in shape for E. Mossop, K. C.

CHAPTER III.

MARY GALT'S STATEMENT

NEXT morning Bressey went about his self-appointed task with tremendous reluctance. Among the chief detestations of his healthy young soul was just this sort of woman, who used her pretty femininity as a license to kill.

And this morning he no longer had Dawson Reddick at his elbow. For Dawson Reddick, at the end of the consultation the previous night, had metaphorically w a s h e d his hands of the entire business with the derisive wish, "My boy, may God grant you a jury of born idiots! That's your only hope."

Bressey did have from Reddick a statement Mary Galt had given her lawyer after her arrest, taken down, not by Reddick, but by meticulous, mediocre Collinson, who did all the hard work of the partnership where Reddick got all the glory and nearly all the rewards.

But Bressey, equally meticulous, wanted his client's story at first hand, if only because the story she had told Reddick, via Collinson, was so hopeless.

A later questioning, he fancied, might give some slight ground on which to base a defense where now he saw no defense whatever.

So, this morning, in the grim, gray county jail, Allan Bressey had his first talk with Mary Galt.

For in Ontario murder is not bailable. That and swift justice are a part of the price the accused criminal pays for immunity from the third degree.

Instead of a cell, they met in the obliging jailer's private parlor, but throughout the interview the young lawyer even saw, with his mind's eye, the background of iron bars.

He found Mary Galt a slim, lithe, well-proportioned girl, with fair, bobbed curls framing a seductive face. Two months' confinement had faded her healthy freckles to mere pale traces. Her blue eyes eagerly sought her lawyer's eyes, and Bressey found himself staring evasively at the floor.

He made his tone brutally business-like.

"I'm taking your defense, Miss Galt. It's necessary, before I go further, to know the exact facts of what happened. If what you tell me wont help your defense, it wont be used. Remember, too, we can talk with perfect safety. No power on earth can make a lawyer disclose his client's secrets. But," he insisted, "between us, there must be absolute frankness. *I must know the whole truth.*"

The slim figure quivered.

"It—it seems too awful to talk about," the girl muttered. "I—why, Mr. Crofton—I can't believe it, Mr. Bressey. It must be a dream. Surely—surely I didn't kill him."

Her voice grew almost hysterical.

Bressey was firm.

"This wont do, Miss Galt," he said harshly. "Hysterics aren't going to help you; not with me. Save them for the jury."

He felt just what he voiced: disgust for callous pretence. The girl regarded him in blank amazement; a look of hurt came to her pretty face; her lip quivered; then she seemed with an effort to pull herself together.

"You want me to tell you everything, Mr. Bressey?"

"That's precisely what I want—the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"And where shall I begin?"

"Go back, if you like, to your mother's business dealings with Crofton."

"You know, Mr. Bressey, dad thought a lot of Mr. Crofton. We all regarded him as a paragon of all the virtues. After dad died Mr. Crofton looked after mother's affairs for her. He was perfectly honest, too, up to this Megantic Silver deal.

"You see, mother had stock in the knitting mills, and when the mills here went into the merger she got $20,000 cash. Mother and Mr. Crofton, between them, decided to put the money in Megantic Silver. That was in December.

"In February Megantic Silver went into liquidation. Then I discovered it had always been worthless, but I heard Mr. Crofton had owned a lot of the stock at one time, but didn't own any when the company failed."

Bressey nodded. This would help in the defense he was slowly shaping; a poor defense, undoubtedly, but the best he could conjure up.

"I wouldn't have minded the money, though its loss meant poverty for us. It was our trusting him so long, and Mr. Crofton taking advantage of her trustfulness to unload those worthless shares.

"I still hoped, though, it wasn't as bad as all that. I went to Mr. Crofton's office. He was in Toronto. I went three times, three different days. The last time another man was there, looking for Mr. Crofton, too; very angry about something. So I guessed then Mr. Crofton must have been crooked with other people as well as with us.

"That evening on Main Street I saw that big, beautiful car come leisurely along. It maddened me to think of that pious old hypocrite parading his wealth after what he'd done. I don't know what I meant to do. I waved the chauffeur to stop. He kept on going. That made me angrier still. I ran out toward him and signaled. This time he stopped the car. . . ."

She halted, putting her hands over her eyes, as though to shut out some haunting vision.

"I ran across to the car and pulled open the door."

"And then?"

Bressey's manner was tensely ex-

pectant, yet disappointed. Disappointed, because this story she told him was the identical story she had told Collinson.

"Then, all at once, something seemed to snap. I don't remember what happened, except I was standing there holding the revolver, and Mr. Crofton had slumped down in the seat with blood all over his face. Pete Lane grabbed my hands, and I went into hysterics, I guess. That's all I remember.

"Oh?" commented Allan Bressey. "So *that's* all you remember, eh?"

He tried to make his gaze penetrating, and ended by staring down at the floor. He was in queerly mingled moods.

He hated this girl—less because she had shot Crofton, who doubtless was a crook, than because she now sought by evasive half-truths and pretty, weeping feminine wiles to escape the consequences of her crime.

Yet from this flimsy material he had to invent a defense for her and keep her from hanging—if he could!

"It's the truth, Mr. Bressey."

BRESSEY pondered.

The girl's story had all the earmarks of the temporary aberration stunt which calculating femininity had time and again put across on susceptible juries. Yes, even here in grim, cold-blooded Ontario, where women were still hanged for murder.

This girl, he argued, must, even before she shot Crofton, have deliberately planned what story she would tell afterward. She must, in the loneliness of her cell, have time and again rehearsed the story. She had gone over it until, perhaps, she herself had come to believe it.

The hopeful blue eyes met his, which tried to mask his utter hopelessness. He felt, with a sudden sinking of the heart, that under any other circumstances he must have liked her. Now he had to hate her for her crime, to despise her for shielding herself behind her sex, and—to conduct her defense.

"Where," he demanded, "did you get the revolver?"

"I—I don't know."

"It was yours, wasn't it?"

"No. I can't tell where it came from. I—I never owned a revolver."

Bressey inwardly cursed the girl's trick of looking him straight in the eyes. That look made him uncomfortable. She must have rehearsed that straightforward look, as she had rehearsed her evasive story, until she had both letter-perfect.

"See here, Miss Galt," he burst forth brutally, "you're not telling me the truth. You signal the chauffeur, you run across to the car, you pull open the door—and, next thing you remember, Crofton is dead with a bullet wound in his head and you're standing there holding that revolver. If you are cross-examined, how are you going to explain that revolver?"

Again the blue eyes regarded him fixedly.

"Why," protested Mary Galt, "I—I'm not denying I shot Mr. Crofton. I simply don't remember."

CHAPTER IV

THE GRISLY WAGER

WHEN Allan Bressey left the gray-stone walls and iron-barred windows of the jail behind, what he most craved was some stronger soul on whom to lean.

He had gone over the evidence, had heard Mary Galt's story, had framed the one possible defense; a defense weak, petty, equivocating, hopeless, yet the best he had.

He had not discussed that defense with Mary Galt herself. The entire

interview was distasteful. The girl's very prettiness made her, as a murderess, more hateful to him.

Fluffy Mrs. Galt that afternoon received Allan Bressey eagerly.

"You've seen Mary?"

"Yes. I got her story. I've pretty well settled my line of defense."

He adopted a tone of business-like assurance he could not feel.

"It's this, Mrs. Galt. Crofton cheated you on that Megantic Silver deal. Mary loved you, had shared your faith in Crofton, brooded on Crofton's crookedness, until the sight of Crofton flaunting his wealth in the eyes of Mornington fairly drove her mad. And, in a fit of—er—dementia, she shot Crofton."

The mother's pretty, youthful face, momentarily aglow with hope, grew ashen.

"No, no!" she protested. "That will never do!"

Allan Bressey stared.

"I see no other defense," he grimly told her. "We will, of course, claim the shot was unintentional, accidental. You see, Mrs. Galt"—as the woman's lips parted to protest—"the facts are inexorable. The prosecution will smother us with a cloud of witnesses who saw Mary fire the shot.

"We lean on three weak reeds—the supposition of dementia, the theory that the shot *might* have been accidental, and sympathy for an impulsive girl justly angered at Crofton's crookedness."

It was the woman's turn to stare.

"But," she vehemently protested, "Mr. Crofton wasn't a crook."

Bressey lost his patience.

"He's got to be a crook, if I'm to save your daughter."

"But, don't you see, Mr. Bressey, anyway, if Mary gets off with that defense, the thought of it will ruin her life? It will haunt her always—that she killed a man. No, just let me finish, please."

Imperiously she silenced his protests.

"Even when she was a little girl, Mary was kind to everything. We had a chicken once that froze its feet, and when I was going to kill the poor bird, Mary made me bandage the stumps. The poor thing hobbled around for years; it was her especial pet."

She wiped her eyes.

"And she was always bringing in homeless cats to feed, and it hurt her so when one of her cats killed a robin. Mary would never kill anything."

"Prosecutor Kergin," countered Bressey harshly, "has twenty witnesses who saw her kill Crofton."

The fluffy little woman blinked in amaze.

"Why, Mr. Bressey, you—you don't believe Mary did it?"

And, incomprehensible though the fact was, Bressey began to grasp this poor woman's deluded belief in her daughter's absolute innocence. Nor was Mrs. Galt hysterical; on the contrary, quite composed.

What concerned her was, not the overwhelming evidence against Mary, but the fear that Mary's after life would be haunted by the thought that, even in accident, she had killed a man.

"So, you see," she concluded, with sweet finality, "you must get her clear absolutely; prove that she didn't fire that shot. Mr. Reddick," she added, "said if anyone could do it, you could."

Inwardly Bressey damned Dawson Reddick.

"See here, Mrs. Galt, if Mary didn't kill Crofton, who did?"

For the first time the woman was at a loss.

"I—I don't know."

"There's only one possible hypothesis—suicide."

"Oh, but," protested Mrs. Galt, "I knew Mr. Crofton. He was a very religious man. He wouldn't do such a horrible thing as kill himself."

MENTALLY, Bressey fairly reeled. The woman's attitude was utterly impossible. But so, he decided, was the suicide hypothesis.

Crofton, in the best of health, a few minutes earlier jubilant at securing control of the Delorme mine, now shooting himself—and waiting till the exact moment that Mary Galt flung open the car door to do the deed.

Prosecutor Kergin would simply laugh that preposterous defense out of court.

So he told the woman, and thereafter weighed his chances of fighting the case out on the assertion that Mary Galt did not fire on the shot; this in the teeth of a score of witnesses who had already testified and would testify again that she did.

"I'll chance it," he told Mrs. Galt. "But, if I fail, don't blame me. The odds are terrible."

Tearful now, Mrs. Galt thanked him.

"But, just the same," Bressey reminded himself, "our real defense hasn't changed one iota—Crofton's crookedness, Mary Galt's prettiness, and the bare chance that the shot might have been accidental."

With Mary Galt's statement, Bressey called that afternoon at the office of Reddick & Collinson. He asked for Mr. Reddick. Mr. Reddick was engaged.

Mr. Reddick continued to be engaged, but Allan Bressey waited until he got through. Then he stamped in.

Reddick regarded him with profound annoyance.

"Oh, see here," he burst forth, "I thought——"

"What you thought doesn't matter," snarled Bressey. "Let your eye glance over this statement."

Reddick, solacing himself with the inevitable cigarette, glanced through the typewritten copy of Mary Galt's deposition. His habitual grin came back.

"Easy on the eyes, isn't she?"

"Yes—confound her!"

"Why the profanity, my learned friend?"

"She's too pretty a thing to spoil——"

"Boy, that's your salvation."

"I don't mean that. For me, she's already spoiled, irretrievably. Not just because she killed Crofton—that's bad enough—but because she relies on her prettiness, her femininity, to get her clear."

Reddick laughed at such callow scruples.

"Your golden opportunity, boy. Hopeless case—lovely client—*cause célebré*. A win will establish your reputation for all time to come."

"A dirty way to make a reputation, saving a criminal from her just deserts. Well, what do you see in her statement?"

"Awful bunk," grunted Reddick. "She's lying, of course, and not too skilfully at that. I can guess your defense. Dementia—accidental shot—and——"

"No. It's a flat assertion that she never fired the shot."

"You infernal fool!" exploded Reddick. "Why, with the overwhelming *prima facie* case Kergin's got, you daren't meet him head on like that. You simply have to sidestep."

AND Reddick grinned. The most complex case he could regard with amused detachment, as a problem to be worked out with the least pos-

sible effort and the most possible glory, along the least resistive line.

"Your t r o u b l e, Al," he commented, "is that when thinking becomes worth while, you cease to think. Take me. Do I spend hours brooding over a case? No. But when I do think, Al, I think clear through a problem. You brood till you reach the point where clear t h i n k i n g is absolutely essential. Then you let your emotions and sympathies run away with your brains."

Bressey argued.

"But where," demanded Reddick, "has Kergin left a loophole? The suicide bluff wont work. Crofton at the depot was cheerful; amazingly so. Kergin's covered that ground already."

Bressey deliberated.

"I see one slight loophole."

"Where?"

"Kergin hasn't covered the right-hand door of that landaulet at the time the shot was fired. The car drew to the left-hand curb, the witnesses were on that side, they saw Mary Galt, excited, snatch open the left-hand door. But no one seems to have been watching the right-hand door at all."

Reddick regarded him in amazement.

"And you w o u l d argue," he gasped, "that someone stepped up to that door and shot Crofton——"

"Or," blurted Bressey, "when the car slowed someone stepped out that door."

Reddick smiled, a smile almost sinister.

"When could he step in?"

"When," countered the young lawyer, "was the last time Crofton was actually known to be alive?"

Reddick answered unhesitatingly:

"When the red landaulet emerged from beneath the C. N. R. viaduct, Crofton whistled up the tube to Pete Lane to slow opposite the knitting mills."

Bressey made no comment.

"And when the car slowed——?"

"Precisely."

"It's the bunk!" disgustedly ejaculated Reddick.

"I agree," returned Bressey bitterly, "it's the bunk. But it's all I have."

"It wont do," argued Reddick. "See here, you might put across the idea of dementia—or accident—or justification—or a combination of all three. But you can't put across the plea that Mary Galt didn't fire that shot."

"I've weighed all that."

"You mean, you've shut it out of your mind. You've taken the one line of defense that's absolutely hopeless. With any other defense you could count on a measure of sympathy. But here your first move is to antagonize the most sympathetic jury by implying that they're fools. Bet you can't get away with it."

Bressey shrank.

"Say a box of cigars?" invited Reddick.

"I—I hardly feel like making a human life the subject of a wager."

"Then you're foolish. A betting lawyer can often keep himself in smokes by side bets on his cases. Well, if you wont bet on human life, bet on the abstract principle—that where the evidence against a murderess leaves you no defense whatever, you can get her free on a straight plea of not guilty.

"I've a box of twenty-five cent cigars to say that the age of miracles is past. And you"—Reddick grinned tauntingly—"you lack the nerve to take me up."

Bressey flared.

"I'll take you up, Reddick. I'll smoke your perfectos in honor of the

twelve good men and true who agree with me that black is white."

CHAPTER V

CROFTON'S CROOKEDNESS

FOR the first time in his brief and briefless career, the swiftly inexorable processes of British justice caused Allan Bressey intense disquietude.

Till now he had regarded this relentless pursuit and conviction of the criminal with satisfaction, and his drastic punishment with equanimity. He had taken pride that he functioned as even a very minor cog in this efficient machine. Even now he would not have altered the process if he could.

Yet it put him in an uncomfortable predicament. Into one busy day of the two weeks allotted him, he had crowded much necessary work. Here it was April 15th. The supreme court sittings would open on the 17th.

Thirteen days were left in which to fling together some sort of defense for Mary Galt; to conjure up some slight support for a contention which not merely ignored but positively defied the proven facts of the case.

He was impatient now to hear from Gordon Cragge at Toronto. Cragge, he anticipated, would furnish evidence to support the contention that Crofton had unscrupulously unloaded on trustful Mrs. Galt his worthless holdings in Megantic Silver.

Would the court admit such evidence? Bressey doubted, yet realized that the sheer desperation of his case, the very lack of defense, might incline a sympathetic judge to admit anything, however farfetched, which would give his client a fighting chance.

Only, Bressey remembered, with a sinking heart, supreme court judges in Ontario were not conspicuously sympathetic, and usually set their faces like flint against any sentimental feminine appeal.

In desperate moments, appalled by the utter hopelessness of the case, two considerations only prevented Bressey throwing up his brief.

One was the unfairness of deserting a client at such a juncture, even a client for whom he could accomplish nothing.

The other was that the keen old brain of Mossop, K. C., would surely pick a flaw in Kergin's case, if there was one.

Yet, unless in this all too brief interval he gathered every available fact, even the great Mossop would be helpless. To approach any of the prosecution witnesses would be futile, if not dangerous. Prosecutor Kergin had undoubtedly warned them not to discuss the case.

Bressey kept Minnie Derwent busy, however, for once in her auburn young life, making transcripts of newspaper clippings, of reports, of evidence, of authorities laboriously compiled—all sorts of material for the steadily fattening brief with which he meant, on the eve of the trial, to confront the famous but erratic K. C.

"And Mossop," he grimly mused, "will get more help out of his bottle of Scotch."

He tacitly avoided Reddick now. He kept away from the club, where he was sure to meet Reddick. But one day on the street he ran into Reddick's partner, Collinson.

This Collinson was a small, grayish man, much older than his senior partner. He greeted Bressey with a stiff nod.

"Oh, I say"—as Bressey was passing on—"did Reddick tell you about that Crofton business?"

Bressey turned swiftly.

"What Crofton business?"

"That paper Crofton left."

Then, as Bressey blinked, uncomprehending:

"You see, Reddick had Crofton's will at the office. He went ahead to probate it, and did. The will gives Tom Shedd practically everything. But it appears now that Crofton had a safety-deposit box at the Commercial Bank, which Reddick had overlooked.

"Old Williamson, the manager, who's a nut on the subject of protecting his bank, insists that because Mrs. Galt's name is mentioned, her legal representative must be present when the document, whatever it is, is handed over to Reddick.

"Reddick," he explained, "is Crofton's executor. I s'pose in his rush to get off to Toronto last night, he forgot to phone you."

Collinson glanced at his watch.

"Four o'clock past. Bank closed for the day. Too late to do anything now! Better wait till Dawson gets back, anyway. Call around on Thursday and see him, will you?"

Bressey promised. He wondered what the document might be. But he soon found a topic to divert his thoughts. At his office a special delivery letter arrived next morning from Cragge, four days ahead of time.

Good old Cragge!

Bressey tore the letter open, and glanced through it. His brow puckered. He reread the letter more carefully. The pucker grew into a frown.

The letter was voluminous. It went into the detailed history of the Megantic Silver venture—"the wildest of Cobalt wildcats," wrote Cragge frankly.

The letter went on:

The list of Mornington shareholders includes J. J. Radcliffe, 500 shares; H. M. Benton, 1,200 shares; Thomas Shedd, 25,000 shares; A. L. Staverton, 2,050 shares. There are no shares in the name of S. B. Crofton, or of anyone who might represent him. Crofton was never a shareholder. There are no shares in the name of Mrs. Atherly Galt, or, in fact, of any Mrs. Galt, of Mornington or elsewhere; so consequently there was no transfer of stock to any Mrs. Galt. I got all this from the liquidator, who has every record of the company.

By the way, the stock was boomed to sell. You know the game? It reached a peak of $2.20, and then someone outside the bull group got wise, and it dropped like a plummet overnight; and next thing we knew, Megantic Silver was dead. It should never have been born.

Bressey, having read thus far, stared at the letter.

Mary Galt had distinctly said "Megantic Silver." Mrs. Galt herself had said "Megantic Silver." Lane, the chauffeur, had referred to "some mining stock," but did not know the name.

Shedd, however, had testified that Mrs. Galt had instructed Crofton to buy Megantic Silver, and he himself had lost money in the same stock.

Yet, according to the records, Mrs. Galt had never bought a single share of Megantic Silver, nor had Crofton himself ever owned any of the stock.

The thing was incomprehensible. Bressey, puzzling, began to suspect even Gordon Cragge of lying, or worse. Then he remembered that he had not finished Cragge's letter. It went on:

Crofton's business here had to do with the famous Delorme Mine—you know, the mystery mine of the Rouyn field. The prospect was located by Francois Xavier Delorme, an old French-Canadian prospector. Delorme had no money, so he interested a group, including Crofton. Crofton, as you know, had been playing the 'come on' game for years, but he told me once he wanted to get into real production.

When Delorme sagged heavily on reports that the lead had petered out, Crofton bought. A fight for control developed between Crofton's group and another faction, with old F. X. Delorme crowded pretty well off the stage.

Crofton was reported down and out, short of funds, nipped—and then, late in February, he came down to Toronto with funds to pick up an outstanding block of stock that gave him control.

Everybody here was looking for the anticipated freeze-out to develop. Then—bang! Your pretty client—to whom all honor and glory—put a period to Crofton's nefarious activities. Since then everybody's been guessing. They're at it yet. And Delorme is climbing through the roof.

Bressey started to his feet, with a triumphant ejaculation.

He, at least, was no longer guessing. Crofton, reported cornered just before his death, had then turned the corner and got control of Delorme. Where, on the spur of the moment, had the money come from?

Crofton got that money from Mrs. Galt. He had taken it to purchase Megantic Silver for Mrs. Galt, and had deliberately used it to buy control of Delorme for himself. To put $20,000 into "a worthless wildcat" and leave Mrs. Galt holding the bag had been crooked enough. To use Mrs. Galt's $20,000 for his own ends and give no accounting was infinitely worse.

Bressey's eyes sparkled with excitement.

"Miss Derwent," he exclaimed, "I have them! Or, at least, I've got Crofton dead to rights. Make three copies of that letter."

And then he sat down heavily. All the triumph had bubbled out of him. Crofton might be a crook of the blackest dye; but Mary Galt was none the less a murderess. Bressey could fancy the grim voice of Prosecutor Kergin addressing the jury eleven days hence:

If Crofton was guilty of malfeasance or dishonesty, he was answerable to the criminal law. He was answerable to Mrs. Galt in the civil courts. But this did not give the prisoner at the bar the right to constitute herself judge, jury and executioner, to try, convict, sentence and condemn him.

Kergin would tell the jury this. A grim, unsympathetic judge would agree with Kergin. But no one, prosecutor, judge or jury, could agree more readily or more emphatically than did Allan Bressey, junior counsel for the defense.

CHAPTER VI

TOO MUCH PUBLICITY

AS April swept relentlessly on, Allan Bressey felt that time was cruelly crowding him. Where the prosecution, with its phalanx of witnesses and its unbreakable case, had all the machinery of the law to dig up evidence, he lacked both the time and the means to seek new information.

"See here," he told himself, again and again, "what facts could you dig up if you had years to investigate? That girl is guilty. Kergin has proved it. You yourself know it. If you're to do anything whatever for her, face the actual facts. Never lose sight of her guilt."

Yet, with the hopeful imagination of youth, he would day-dream all manner of hypotheses, mostly pivoting on that right-hand door of the red landaulet which nobody had seen; and in his nights would dream new evidence which, unfortunately, refused to prove plausible even in his dreams.

So day leaped after day, while Minnie Derwent's nimble fingers tapped out transcripts and the brief for Mossop, K. C., grew portentous in size even while it remained pitifully meager in hope.

Friday evening Bressey had quite forgotten his chance rencontre with Collinson two days earlier, when at the club he picked up the Mornington *Star* and his eyes were affronted with flaring headlines:

STARTLING DISCLOSURES ARE PROMISED IN MURDER DEFENSE

Switch to Brilliant Young Lawyer Threatens Upset for Prosecutor Kergin

Bressey, dumfounded, glanced down the newspaper article:

What is the significance of the sudden switching of Mary Galt's defense from Dawson Reddick to Allan Bressey? has been a question current throughout Mornington for several days past, since the fact leaked out that the brilliant young Mornington lawyer had been retained for the Galt defense.

The secret of the change, almost on the eve of the trial, has been carefully guarded. Mrs. Galt referred all interrogations to Mr. Bressey, and Mr. Bressey, when questioned by the *Star*, was decidedly non-committal.

Bressey frowned. Someone had telephoned him the day before to ask what seemed impertinent questions. "And I shot him off the limb," he mused, with satisfaction.

He read on:

Mr. Bressey flatly refused to disclose the line the new defense intended to take; but in circles close to Mr. Bressey it is freely asserted that a smashing surprise awaits Prosecutor Kergin when the trial opens. Some facts newly discovered will, it is claimed, throw an entirely different light in the case.

Here are the three questions upon which, it is intimated, the defense will turn, and to which Prosecutor Kergin must find satisfactory answers if he is to convict Mary Galt.

First: What happened when the red landaulet containing Mr. Crofton, on the way from the C. N. R. depot to Main Street, slowed opposite the knitting mills?

Second: Was Samuel B. Crofton alone after the landaulet passed the knitting mills?

Third: Was anyone, at the precise moment the shot was fired, watching the right-hand door of the Crofton landaulet?

It is upon the anticipated answers to these three questions that the defense is reported to base its decision to fight the case out on an emphatic assertion that, in spite of the smoking revolver in her hand, Mary Galt did not fire the shot which killed Samuel B. Crofton.

Can Prosecutor Kergin clear up these questions?

"We have answered them already," Prosecutor Kergin told a *Star* reporter, "but when the trial comes we will, if need be, answer them yet more emphatically. Mary Galt murdered Samuel B. Crofton. For her crime she must pay the extreme penalty. The report referred to is merely a last, desperate effort to inject some slight element of doubt into a situation where the incontrovertible facts made defense absolutely hopeless."

But is the defense hopeless? Allan Bressey plans, a little more than a week hence, to prove the contrary. Meanwhile he keeps the details of his defense to himself.

It is rumored also that E. Mossop, K. C., a leader of the Toronto bar and famous for his success in difficult criminal cases, will be associated with Mr. Bressey in the Galt defense.

ALLAN Bressey crumpled the paper.

"Damn!" he ejaculated.

He went straight to the telephone and called the editor of the Mornington *Star*, demanding, in white-hot tones, where he got the information on which the newspaper article was based.

He added something even more sizzling regarding the legal perils of commenting on a case *sub judice*, and a brimstone postscript on "yellow journalism of the worst type."

The editor smoothly explained that he thought the article would help the defense, and added with bland irony that the defense ought to welcome help, from whatever source. As to the *Star's* informant—it was not customary to tell such things. But Mr. Bressey could telephone Mr. Stubbs, the city editor.

Stubbs, being a good journalist, explained that he positively could not tell where he got his information, but, being to boot a rather weak-kneed chap, suggested that, if Dawson Reddick knew anything about the matter, Dawson Reddick was under no journalistic obligations to conceal anybody's identity.

"You mean," snapped Bressey, "that Reddick gave you the story?"

He hung up without waiting for

an aswer. Reddick might be somewhere about the club. In which surmise Bressey was correct; a few minutes later he found Reddick playing billiards and telling an interested audience with characteristic verve how he had just secured acquittal for a notoriously guilty bootlegger.

"I want to see you," growled Bressey. "Alone."

Bressey placidly finished his shot, terminated his story, and laid aside his cue.

"What is it?"

Bressey waited, though, until they were alone. Then he pointed an accusing finger at the newspaper article.

"What about that?" he demanded.

He had expected Reddick to deny or to equivocate; but Reddick merely laughed.

"Publicity," he commented. "The life blood of our business. The *Star* wanted a story, and you needed publicity—and, with every justification in the world, you weren't getting it. Here you'd had the Galt defense nearly a week, and pulled not a line in the papers. So I said, 'It's up to me to give the boy a boost.'"

"And," snapped Bressey, "in order to give me a miserable little boost in a contemptible little newspaper, you disclose my entire defense to Kergin."

"You didn't tell me that was your defense?"

Bressey realized that. Where he had merely hinted, Reddick piecing together the hints and adding to them had guessed the wild hypothesis upon which Bressey meant to base his theory of an alternative murder.

He ignored Reddick's protests.

"Whatever my defense, its whole value lay in the surprise—in taking Kergin quite unprepared. Now Kergin is forewarned. He'll scurry around and find someone who watched that right-hand door."

"Precisely. Kergin, to forestall your defense, will pile evidence on evidence. The more testimony, the more chances of picking flaws in his case. I know Kergin. Anyway," ironically, "supposing Kergin finds a witness who saw someone step out that right-hand door, or even saw that door swinging open? That is your case. If the facts can't prove it——"

Not until that moment did Bressey realize what an edifice of hope he had subconsciously erected on that silly hypothesis.

"Of course," he conceded, "there was no one. The door was closed. If Kergin had simply failed to cover that point, it might have helped. But now——"

"You've still got the Eternal Triangle: Crofton's crookedness. The suggestion of dementia. And—the prettiest face in Mornington."

"The prettiest face in Mornington," absently repeated Bressey. "Oh, yes. Well," he added, "your infernal interview——"

And then for the first time he remembered his talk with Collinson.

"What about that document?" he demanded.

"What document?"

"That document Williamson of the Commercial Bank refuses to hand over to you unless some representative of Mrs. Galt is present?"

Reddick's face was a study. Just for a moment—then his customary aplomb returned.

But that moment was enough. Allan Bressey realized that he was not intended to know of the existence of that document—that once more in his careful, conscientious career of unassuming mediocrity, meticulous Collinson had blundered.

(*To be Concluded*)

Curtain

By ALAN WILLIAMS

SELMA FERENZ, with her usual contempt for the established order, threw the crumpled letter into the cuspidor and her cigarette into the waste-paper basket, and then called out to her dancing partner who dressed on the other side of the thin partition:

"Hey, Georgie!"

"Yes, my love!" the answer came, but the tone was hardly affectionate—rather mocking, in fact.

"Don't 'my love' me," Selma snapped. "Sophie Renton asked me tonight, when she was telling me how big my act would go in London, if Jimmy boy was jealous of my new partner."

"So, Soph' thought *your* act would go big in London, did she? She didn't say anything about *our* act."

No, the voice of Georgie was not affectionate; quite venomous.

"She noticed that I had a new partner," Selma elaborated, "and that was when she ast me if Jimmy boy wasn't jealous."

"And you said when she *asked* you that?"

Georgie, billed Georges Damara, was endeavoring desperately to correct his partner's diction, but he dared not tutor her across the thin partition. He could only correct her pointedly, and hope for the best.

But the correction was quite lost.

"I ast her if she had looked at you before she said that!"

Selma left nothing to her partner's imagination. She went on: "I told her that Jimmy boy might be jealous of the carpenter or the electrician or even some of the comics on the bill, but he'd never be jealous of you!"

Selma decided she had gone far enough.

"I'm only kidding you, Georgie."

"In your usual big-hearted way," Georgie interpolated. "Well, what else is on your mind?"

"If you're rushing off on another wild party, stop in here for a minute first," Selma requested. "It's important."

"Be right over."

George Davis, soda-jerker and chorus boy, rechristened Georges Damara for purposes of big-time vaudeville, merited the insults his partner heaped upon him.

Effeminate, affected, pomaded and perfumed, obnoxiously graceful except when dancing, he was everything which was contemptible to Sallie Ferris of the Ferris Family, nurtured in the circus, educated in burlesque and now, as Selma Ferenz, a headliner in "ree-fined" vaudeville and expensive revues.

Looking at Georgie as he steps into her dressing-room for the requested conference, at first glance he seems to be the regulation good-looking, carefully groomed young man.

But look again and it will be seen that his dress-coat has lapels much too wide, and the trousers are too heavily braided; his Inverness cape falls into far too many pleats, and the high hat is much too high. The healthy tan is grease-paint, and the wave was put into his hair at the same time as the magnificent polish was administered to his finger-nails.

He is a work of art, but so few people appreciate art in this commercial age.

BUT Selma noticed nothing of this, not even the gorgeous cape which was new, and supposed to be noticed. She was far too distressed, and then she was accustomed to Georgie in all his gorgeousness.

"I've cancelled the rest of our time, Georgie," she said. "We leave for New York, Monday morning."

"But what's the big idea?" Georgie demanded. "You know we oughtn't to go back to New York now. We're just going good, and I'm not only thinking about work either. What's the matter? Have you run out of gin or something?"

Her patience, if she had exhibited any, was at an end.

"Now look here, Georgie Davis, you heard me say we was going back——"

"Were, Selma, were!"

"Was, were, are, am—any damn thing, but we're going to New York, Monday morning, and the less I hear from you the better I'm pleased. Am I going to hafta——"

Georgie threw up his hands, but said nothing. Selma understood, and even in her excitement, painfully corrected herself, as she proceeded:

"Is it necessary for me to tell you every day where you get off? You was—were ragging down thirty-five bucks a week when Jimmy boy took you out of the merry-merry, and now you're getting six hundred, net, besides fifty-fifty on outside dates. Any time you can better yourself just fly away, little birdie, fly away. Jimmy boy can always train another partner for me; you know better'n me that New York is full of chorus boys who are dancin' fools."

"I'm not denying what you did for me, Selma," Georgie interrupted; "and if you'll only give me a chance, I'm trying to do things for you."

"All right, son," Selma said somewhat repentantly. "I know you're trying to learn me to talk, and I want to so we can get by on Park Avenue and Lake Shore Drive, but——"

"Look how the Apache goes over since you've learned the words in French," Georgie flattered. "I heard a woman in a box tonight say, 'She must be French.' And that was a good idea of doing one line in English tonight between the French. How did you happen to think that up?"

"Because I forgot the French, stupe!"

"Well, leave it that way," Georgie advised. "It makes the French more effective; calls attention to it. And you will admit that it gets a bigger hand than it did."

"Yes, I'll admit that," Selma agreed, "but it's still a long ways from getting the hand it did when Jimmy boy was doing it. That's what you're forgetting, Georgie, my lad. You can dance, but you can't act. If you ever really learn to act then I'll bill you with me, instead of 'supported by'."

"I'm not kicking about the billing. I'm not kicking about anything. Only you know it's applesauce to go back to New York. You've said yourself that for the time being it was better for you and Jimmy boy to be separated. Go on a big drunk here if it's staying sober that's getting on your nerves. I'll drag you to the theatre in time."

"Aw, pipe down. I thought it would work out all right, but it hasn't. He wont take a nickel from me. He's bootlegging. I thought so; but Johnny Whitman writes me that he believes Jimmy boy is peddling hop, too. Oh, God!"

"Of all the fools!" That was the sympathy of Georgie. "But what's he got against your money? He's

part owner of the act, ain't he?"—Even Georgie could forget his diction when sufficiently excited—"I thought that was definitely understood; he was to get the difference between half and what I get."

"Of course, it was!" Selma agreed. "And I've been sending it to him, and more, too; telling him to keep it for me. He can save money when he has it, which is more than I can do—and what does he do? Banks every nickel of it in my name, and peddles liquor and hop to support himself; to keep his self-respect."

"That's rare!" Georgie observed. "Peddling hop to save his self-respect!"

"I know it must seem rare to you, Georgie, but I understand it. I can understand a man who'd peddle hop before he'd take money from a woman; although in this case it is all wrong. But Jimmy boy is a nut. That's why he's where he is. There are men like that. Men who would pick a pocket before they would panhandle; men who play the honky-tonks forever because they wont steal somebody else's stuff; men who'd sweep the streets before they'd be in a chorus!"

Now, Georgie was angry. He drew his cape imperiously about his slim waist, and stalked furiously to the door.

"Don't go away mad, Georgie," Selma called. "Have a good time at your wild, wild party and don't tell any of the bad girls your right name! But remember we go to New York, Monday."

Georgie turned in the doorway and made a magnificent gesture, revealing his emerald-buttoned vest, his single-studded shirt, his platinum-linked watch-chain.

"Go to New York!" was his ukase. "Go to Hell, and see if I care!"

"We probably will," Selma muttered.

TO New York they did go, and to Hell—some of them—and thus it happened:

New York was fatal to the morale of little Sallie Ferris—gorgeous Selma Ferenz. They played three weeks at the Hippodrome in spite of the broken Orpheum contract; excuses accepted, fine levied, remitted, and all forgiven.

Then a week each at the other vaudeville houses; a nightly, or rather a twice-nightly sensation at the Club Mentonne; an added attraction in the snobbish ballroom of Mrs. VanTyle; and then, of course, at the parties of all the climbers.

Fabulous offers for Florida, other offers for England—Sophie Renton was right—and none of it meant anything because little Sallie—gorgeous Selma, was on the toboggan, drinking herself to death with Jimmy boy; forcibly dragged to the theatre and the night club by Georgie—Georgie, almost hysterical with responsibility and aggravation.

"Do you know what you said to Mrs. Whittlesey this afternoon; do you know what you said? She said our work was wonderful, but one little bit of the Apache she thought a trifle strong for her children's party and what did you say?"

"Whatever I said goes double and so's your old man!"

Selma was obviously stupefied or she would have thought of better repartee than that.

Georgie attempted another line of attack.

"Selma, do you realize what you're doing? Do you think anybody can drink liquor the way you do and live?"

"Well, who said anything about wanting to live? Don't you suppose, my precious, that I'd rather drink myself to death with Jimmy boy than live to dance myself to death with you and the likes of you?"

Drunk or sober, she could always subdue him, render him speechless; infuriated beyond her comprehension and desperate, as only a small-souled man can be desperate. It was all so senseless.

Georgie, of course, was not thinking of his own ambitions, his own earnings which were buying his lounge suits of leaf-green and smoke-gray, his custom-built shoes, and his tailored pajamas; of course, he was not thinking of those things.

He was thinking of Selma who was destroying herself with Jimmy boy instead of going away and insisting upon Jimmy boy taking a cure. That was the thing to do; everyone agreed. Everyone, that is, except Jimmy boy and Selma.

No parties now for Georgie. He had to be on the job every minute, because Selma, on her own, could not be trusted to appear for any performance. She had even lost the one trait most pronounced in her character—professional pride. That was gone, and the defeat of Georgie was inevitable. Still they were booked. The managers paraphrased Lincoln and Grant, and were glad to get her, drunk or sober.

THE climax came one morning when they were to dance for the great producer, who was building a revue for a wildly heralded foreign star.

Selma Ferenz, s u p p o r t e d by Georges Damara, was scheduled as the chief supporting artist. It meant a splendid salary, a year in New York, increased prestige and more money when they returned to vaudeville.

All these things Selma understood; and she also understood that the great producer was not a man with whom one could trifle. Understood it all; and was not there for the morning showing; the excuses of Georgie were swept aside, and Selma Ferenz not considered further for the revue of revues.

Georgie had done his best but Georgie's best was not good enough. He was viciously furious. No sympathy for Selma, no understanding of the pitiful condition of Jimmy boy, only pity for himself.

He had worked so hard for the opportunity—nature of the work not specified and as a matter of fact consisting only in being a poor substitute for Jimmy boy—and now he had lost this great chance.

He must do something; his whole future depended upon it. He had just enough intelligence to realize that only as the dancing partner of Selma Ferenz was he in demand; without her he would soon slip back into the chorus. He must save Selma Ferenz or he was lost. Never had she been so brilliant as in these gin-soaked days and nights, but it could not last—human frame can stand so much; no more.

He did the treacherous, horrible thing which had been suggested to him by a friend—a friend who was still in the chorus; a friend who borrowed Georgie's spats, and Georgie's fox-lined overcoat, and Georgie's money. A friend indeed, ready with such splendid advice; although to give Georgie due credit, he had thought of the drastic action himself.

Selma, pale-eyed, blue-lipped, and desperately ill was at the theatre in time for the matinee. Yes, she was a trouper—bred in the bone: one of the Ferris Family. She was fumblingly apologetic for she knew how vile the tongue of Georgie could be. But G e o r g i e was strangely silent; Georgie had been craven, and Georgie was frightened.

"Wasn't there some place where we were supposed to be this morning?" she asked.

"Yes, some place," Georgie said bitterly. "The 'Twiller revue!"

"That was it! I knew there was something; sorry, Georgie; but I'll get us a better one. Watch me."

"All right, Selma."

She looked at him suspiciously. Something was certainly wrong. Not a word of reproach; not an oath; just—"All right, Selma!" Something in the wind. What had he been up to? Something, to be sure. She found out just before they went on for their opening number.

She was called to the telephone, and finally understood the significance of the message. A wild shriek—and the stage manager arrived on the run.

"Jimmy boy is pinched! Pinched! Of course, I'll go on. Just tell Johnny Burke to do three more minutes, and I'll be ready. Get me a drink of gin; it's in my dressing-room——"

A drink did she say? A half-pint at a swallow, and then on to the stage—a swirl, a smile and a kick. Dancing in the arms of her partner; dancing in the arms of Judas. Dancing with a smile on her lips, and calling him the vilest names that ever a woman has called a man.

"Don't try to deny it. Cookson said it couldn't be anyone else. They knew right where to go for everything. No one else knows; not a living soul."

He was not denying it. He did it for her own good.

"Where have I heard that before? Every yellow stool-pigeon in the world has that alibi. I'm warning you—watch out. Watch out when Jimmy boy is turned loose; and he'll be turned loose tonight if it takes fifty thousand bucks to bail him out."

The number is over. Even more applause than usual; there is something electric in the air which the audience catches. Now, Georgie dances alone for a few minutes while Selma changes her frock. Will she come back? God knows what she will do. He must be prepared for anything.

Of course, she comes back, elflike and fragile in the costume of rosebuds and chiffon. This is their loveliest dance, but not the most sensational; that is always the Apache, the finale.

"It was the only thing, Selma—the only thing left——"

Desperate words falling trippingly from his lips, faster than the tempo of the tango-waltz. "Don't you see? They'll give him a cure. It's his only chance——"

Georgie! Georgie! Forgetting your perfect English, and showing again your gutter origin.

"It'll give you a break, too. You're no dummy, Selma; you oughter see that!"

"Shut your jaw before I crack you one, and give these babies a laugh they ain't looking for. A chance! A fine chance you're giving him. It's the government what's got him, and that means Leavenworth. That's where he'll get the cure. Didjer ever hear of anyone living through it? Answer me that one, you——"

It's no use; it can't be done; her language can't even be suggested.

"I didn't know anything about the government officers," Georgie whines. "I thought it was just the coppers——"

"You thought! You squealed because we missed the Twiller revue?"

NO answer to that for the dance is over, and hand in hand, smile with smile they take the applause. Now, Selma has an intricate bit of ballet-dancing, classical and expert, while Georgie jumps into the Apache costume.

Selma makes her change in the wings, the maid waiting behind the screen—the maid waiting with a telegram. Silly, black maid to give Selma the telegram now. Selma reads

it, and falls against the make-up table; then quickly recovers. The maid catches her; the stage manager retrieves the crumpled telegram.

"Ring down the curtain! Set the stage for——"

"Ring down the curtain, hell! I'm all right. Where's that gin?"

There it is, little Sallie Ferris—gorgeous Selma Ferenz. Didn't your mother go on the day her brother was killed at the Paris Exposition? Didn't the Ferris kids perform the night their dad was buried? Didn't Maude Adams play the afternoon the Lusitania went down?

All right, Selma, there's the gin bottle. And now a long pull and it's empty—the rest of the gin, the most excellent gin, four dollars for an alleged quart which is really only twenty-four ounces.

Georgie is waiting; Georgie has done his bit of pantomime twice—Georgie the gigolo; Georgie, the murderer. That is what she calls him. Can call him anything now, for the applause is tumultuous.

This is the dance they love. They have all seen it before, these sophisticated New Yorkers; but they love it.

No one in the world can do the Apache with the abandon of Selma Ferenz. Of course, this bird Damara—is he French or Spanish or Tenth Avenue?—isn't so good as Jimmy Bering was, but then he's fair, and getting better all the time. A marvelously, effective vicious make-up he wears today. And Selma Ferenz!

That baby can act; say, she ought to be in the legit'. Just look at that expression if you don't think she's in the Bernhardt class. And a regular Bernhardt accent too as she sings:

"Je l'ai tell'ment dans la peau . . ."

"No use your getting hysterical, Selma. Jimmy boy isn't so far gone; he'll get a grip on himself; they'll cure him."

"Cure him. He's cured—he's cured——"

Something in her voice! What does she mean?

"Des qu'i s'ap-proch' c'est fi—ni . . ."

Fini!

"He said they'd never take him alive. He always carried a wad of it just for that."

Some words she sings and some she missed. But the audience doesn't know; only knows it is seeing a rare bit of acting.

"Quand ses yeux sur moi se pos'nt ca m'rend tout . . ."

Doesn't know exactly what she sings, but knows he'll never take her in his arms again; never in this world, and Selma isn't sure of any other.

"Jimmy boy would never do that, Selma!"

"Wouldn't! Do you see Betty reading the telegram? Look at Marcus, and then say he hasn't——"

Marcus, the stage-manager is leaning against a set, weeping, all unashamed. Everybody loved Jimmy boy; everybody except Georgie who once made thirty-five a week and now has five thousand in the bank. Georgie loves Georgie. Nobody else.

"Je l'ai tell'ment dans la peau. . . ."

Again!

SHE forces him to dance with her to the side of the stage where he can see them all—Marcus, the manager; Betty, the maid; Jerry, the acrobat; Mike, the comedian; all of them weeping. It's going to take a lot of nerve to walk through those wings, Georgie. Better to stay on the stage forever.

"I don't believe it!"

All he can think to say—he doesn't believe it.

Now her hand clutches at his throat. Great stuff! Attagirl! Tears away the red shirt, and the undershirt with it. Baby-blue silk underwear beneath the Apache shirt. There's a laugh. And now drops of red on the baby-blue. Her fingernails dig viciously into his flesh.

"Qu' au moin dre mot . . ."

Where to go, Selma? Only one place—wherever J i m m y b o y is. Georgie is frightened—Georgie tries to dance her off the stage. She is mad, hysterical—he wont believe it—she's drunk——

But he can't dance her off. She's the stronger and forces him back; straight back—down-stage centre.

"I'm f'rait fair'n 'im-por-te quoi . . ."

It's murder. You murdered him, Georgie, first-degree murder, cold-blooded and premeditated and they wont do a thing to you; can't even arrest you. And some of your friends, your friends of the chorus, Georgie, will say you were right. Other "did-it-for-your-own-good" babies.

Now for the final bit with the knife. Sharp knife, too, for when he wrenches it away from her and throws it against the wall it is supposed to stick, so the audience will know how sharp it is.

It always went into the prop with a ring when Jimmy boy threw it, but Georgie is not always so successful. It takes a man to throw a knife, and Georgie is only half a man.

Today he can't even wrench the knife away from her, and knows he'd better, too.

"You're drunk, Selma! You've missed the cue."

"Of course, I'm drunk. Drunker'n the devil and I'll never be sober again——"

"J'tue-rais ma foi. . . ."

Now she has the knife out of her garter. You think that boy can't act? You're crazy. Look at that expression, and if that ain't a mean battle, we never saw one. Neither did the music men in the pit; they almost forget to play. Anyway, this is a dance of broken tempos.

They've changed the business. They never fought with the knife that way before. Can't act! Where'd you ever see better acting than that, as his face twitches with deadly, contorted fear and yet he continues to dance.

Oh, mama! If that knife didn't go into him. You poor fish! Didn't you ever see a stabbing act before? Through the shirt, between the arm and the chest, and then he spills the red ink, or whatever it is—clever work though—every trouper knows it——

Selma has forgotten her French words again. No matter. English will do!

"For whatever my man is. . . .
I am his forever more."

Forever more!

Crash of finale. Enough. Such applause and from jaded Broadway, too.

Marcus the stage-manager shrieking: "You damn fool. Pull the curtains! And keep them down!"

But little Sallie Ferris—gorgeous Selma Ferenz, born trouper, must acknowledge applause. Steps between the curtains, the red ink—or whatever it is—dripping from her hands. Stands before the applauding audience with a smile on her face; not the trouper's smile—still the smile of the Apache.

"It ain't no use to beat your palms," she spat at them. "The lousy bum is dead."

Sinister House

By CHARLES G. BOOTH

A FOUR PART STORY—CONCLUSION

CHAPTER XXII

BEFORE THE CROCODILE AWOKE

GAIL stared at the closed door for a full minute, her eyes wide and her mouth open. She was aware of nothing but that lean, dark face in the room beyond, which she still saw as clearly as if the closed door were transparent.

Consciousness of her surroundings returned to her and she saw that the girl whom Blondy had addressed as Belle was watching her curiously a short distance away.

Recovering herself, she affected a casual air, and going to the staircase ascended it unconcernedly. She was relieved to find that Blondy had not yet come up to their room.

As she sat down by the window her amazement gave way to relief and joy and a chuckling appreciation of Kerry's resourcefulness.

Bartlett and his men were as unlikely to seek Kerry in the kitchen of the Green Crocodile as they were to look for her on the dance floor of the same establishment!

But soon these emotions were overshadowed by fear.

What if Kerry should be recognized by any of the employees of the roadhouse? This was not unlikely, for the affair at the Casa de Ayer had set the country by the ears and Kerry's face had become a daily feature of the press.

She had another dismaying thought: Kerry might see her; might have seen her already, in fact. In either event his course of action was problematical; one could never tell about Kerry.

So indignant might he be at finding her in such a place as the Green Crocodile that he would make a scene and ruin everything.

She wondered what she had better do. Her mind was quickly made up. She would find him after dawn and forestall any action he might have decided upon by telling him everything and insisting on his coöperation.

Blondy came in just then.

"Well, old dear, how'd you make out?"

"Not too badly. I had to correct him once or twice," Gail returned.

Blondy kicked off her black pumps.

"Oh, Eddie's a sweet child. Lord! I'm tired, Red. Let's go to bed; big doings tomorrow night."

Gail was too troubled in spirit to sleep much and she got up at dawn, dressed quietly and crept downstairs. The Green Crocodile was as still as a tomb and Gail let herself out by a side door, unobserved.

The sun was rising above the ridge of the peninsula. A silver sheen lay on the troubled breast of the ocean and the grounds were flushed and lovely with golden light.

Gail walked in the gardens like Aurora, goddess of morning, and

presently, by way of a cinder path, she came to the edge of the cliff.

The cliff fell steeply to a nest of ragged rocks and curling spray a hundred feet below. On the top of the cliff was an outcropping of rock with a little seat hollowed out of the face of it. A man sat on the seat with his head in his hands.

"Kerry!" Gail said gently.

His head came up with a jerk, he sprang to his feet and looked at her with eyes so sunken that they seemed deep hollows with dark fire in their depths.

"Gail!" he whispered.

He held his hands out toward her, but he did not move. The misery in his face hurt her and she went toward him with a tempest of emotion in her heart. She wanted to touch him, to draw his head down tight against her breast, to run her hands through his hair.

"You poor Kerry!" she found herself saying. "You mustn't look at me like that!"

He caught her almost savagely by the arms, and she saw a blaze of indignation in his eyes.

"My God, Gail! You must tell me what you are doing round this dump!"

She smiled secretively.

"I've a better job than you have, Kerry."

"Flirting with that pin-headed prune you had last night!" he stormed. "I saw you dancing with him! I saw him bring you out here!"

All at once his eyes were wet and piteous.

"What are you doing here, Gail? Who was he? You must tell me! I'll kill the beggar!"

Gail smiled.

"Can anyone see us, Kerry?"

"No!"

"Kiss me and then I will."

He looked at her with his old grin breaking out all over his face.

"Golly! Do you mean it?"

Then he caught her to him, kissed her suddenly, soundly, and severally, held her apart, grinned rapturously down at her, and did it all over again. They clung to each other for a long minute, their hearts beating together.

Time and place were forgotten; they lived in a world of illusion, a tiny golden sphere of light and love and song as remote from reality as star from star.

KERRY drew Gail down beside him onto the little seat hollowed out of the face of the rock. They could feel the rock tremble beneath the pounding of the tide brigades below.

"Tell me all about it, Gail," he said.

"How did you manage to get into the Green Crocodile?" she countered.

Kerry chuckled.

"When I got out of the Casa de Ayer the other morning I knew they'd get me soon after dawn unless I got off the peninsula and there seemed mighty little chance of my being able to do that. I flipped that note up onto your balcony, then I sneaked down into a canyon in which I had hidden before. It was the best place of which I knew.

"Pretty soon it was dawn and I got to glancing through that sheet of newspaper in which you wrapped those sandwiches. It was a Los Angeles paper, the classified section, and I stumbled across an ad in the help wanted column for a dishwasher at the Green Crocodile.

"There was my chance, I figured. The Croc was right under Bartlett's nose, so he wouldn't think of looking for me there. I applied for the job and got it. That's all. Your turn now, honey."

Gail was laughing. It was just the sort of thing he would do, of course! These quirks of character, these odd unexpectednesses bound him to her as with chains of steel.

She told him everything that had happened since they had parted above the open trap-door. When she had done he was silent for a moment. Then his hand tightened on hers.

"Golly!" he whispered huskily. "I'll never forget this, Gail! Doing this for me! I—oh, Lord!"

He grew incoherent with emotion.

"That beast Kessler! I'd like to wring his neck! When I think of you coming to a joint like this—for me!"

He choked up again; his arm slid around Gail's slim shoulders and he drew her to him tightly.

"You are the real thing, girl! I'll never be able to do enough for you."

He paused again.

"We'd better be getting back to the house. You are not going through with it. I am going to give myself up."

"You are not!"

His arm no longer encircled a soft and pliant human form, but a quivering bundle of steel wires that whirled out of his embrace.

"You are not!" Gail said again.

She did not raise her voice, but there was a hard, compact note in it that made him look at her in bewilderment. Her face was white; her lips were trembling; her dark eyes blazed with a quality of indignation he had never found in them before.

"Gail——" he began.

She swept his protest aside.

"I've started this thing, Kerry, and I am going through with it! Kessler saw Stark kill Dimity and he's going to tell what he saw. You can't stop me. Don't try!"

His dark eyes were anxious.

"Look here, Gail. You can't stay in this place. I know what I am talking about. The Croc is the toughest 'high-class' roadhouse north of the Mexican border.

"Besides, this is the night of the 'Twenty-five Club.' They come down once a month and raise Cain. They are *wild*, let me tell you! Jim Beasley stands for anything they like to put over. If that bird Kessler comes, you'll not be safe! You can't stay!"

"Do you really think I cannot look after myself?"

"It isn't that, Gail. The Croc is tough. It's no place for you; for any decent girl, for that matter."

Gail laughed.

"Men like you are funny, Kerry. They always want to wrap their women up in tissue-paper. It's no use, you old dear! I am going through with it."

Kerry's jaw set stubbornly.

"You are not! I forbid it!" he said solemnly. "If you stay here another hour I'll give the show away. I'll tell Beasley who you are and I'll hand myself over to Bartlett. I'm going to do that, anyway."

GAIL looked at him silently for a moment; there was an ominous flicker in her eyes.

"If you do," she said steadily, "you needn't see me again."

"Gail!"

"I mean it!"

His solemn front collapsed; he looked at her in consternation.

"Lord!" he groaned, running his hands through his hair.

Then he sat up straight.

"You must be reasonable, Gail! Doctor McEwan and this newspaper chap, Perrin, have turned up new evidence, you say. It points to Stark. I am just as sure as you are that he is guilty. What is the use of fooling around any longer? They can't convict me in the face of this new stuff!"

Gail shook her head.

"I'm not so sure about that, Kerry. There is a tremendous feeling against you. I don't believe you realize how strong it is. A jury might acquit you. I am not at all sure that it

would; but people would still believe you had had something to do with it.

"We don't want that. There mustn't be a breath of suspicion against you. Kessler can clear you. He saw Stark kill Dimity and he's got to tell what he saw!

"Besides, Colonel Conniston and old Dimity have been murdered in cold blood. I couldn't bear to think of that beast Stark going unpunished. It's got to be proven against him. Blondy is going to help me. I don't see why you should object. I am going through with it, anyhow, so please don't say any more about it."

Kerry saw that he was beaten. He surrendered gracefully.

"All right. But I am going to keep my eye on that bird Kessler. Yell if he touches you and I'll break his neck!"

Gail diplomatically left it at that.

They parted presently and Gail went back to the room she shared with Blondy. The latter, sitting up in bed, greeted her with a yawn.

"Hello, dearie, where've you been?"

"Out in the grounds," Gail said. "Do you know anything about the 'Twenty-five Club,' Blondy?"

"'Twenty-five Club?' Sure! This is their night at the Croc. Why?"

"Oh, I heard someone mention the [illegible]me downstairs," Gail replied casually. "What kind of a club is it?"

Blondy winked.

"A good time outfit, I'd call it. They are a wild bunch. They travel around the roadhouses a lot. Their main hangout is in Los Angeles. Quite a few of the movie crowd belong to it. They carry their own booze with 'em. It's a wonder to me the dry squad don't get them. My much lamented ex-husband is a member."

"Kessler! Indeed!"

"Uh-huh. They'll make things hum tonight, take it from me! Jim Beasley is some entertainer when he starts and he always puts on something slick when the 'Twenty-fivers' come. Not troubling you, is it, Red?"

"Why, no, Blondy."

"Thought you might be worrying about Nick. Don't! Throw in the riot call if he gets sassy. Real sassy, I mean."

"Do you believe he will say what I want him to say, Blondy?" Gail asked tensely.

She clasped her hands; her face whitened a little.

"I am depending on it," she said earnestly. "It means—you know what it means!"

Blondy slipped out of bed and put her arm around Gail's shoulders.

"Sure he will, Red! Feed him booze enough and he'll tell you everything he knows, and then some. Cheer up! You'll get what you want, all right. I'll steer him onto you as soon as he comes in.

"He'll want one of them booths on the balcony. I'll park myself in the one behind. Leave that part of it to me."

Gail nodded.

"It's awfully decent of you, dear."

"Slush!"

But Gail had suddenly begun to doubt the practicalness of their plan. There was something hasty and unsubstantial about it. Too flimsy a structure it seemed for the burden she had to put upon it.

Would evidence received under such conditions have the authority a court would require? Had Kerry been right, after all? Was she complicating the affair still further to no purpose whatever?

Her misgivings made her wretched and she pulled herself together. She was going to put it over, somehow!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SATURNALIA

THAT evening, from behind the mahogany rail which surrounded the dance-floor of the Green Crocodile, Gail saw the "Twenty-Fivers" descend in a whirlwind upon the roadhouse and take undisputed possession of it.

They came in high-powered cars that made the night hideous with screaming horns and open cut-outs. They entered with bursts of hilarious laughter that affected the tipsy atmosphere of the Crocodile as a draft of champagne would a bibulous elderly gentleman.

There had been a sizable crowd in the place before their arrival. But now the tables were thronged and out on the floor a mass of humanity as colorful as a regiment of rainbows slid and rotated and whirled to the musical gymnastics of the orchestra.

The uproar became deafening. Everybody talked and nobody listened. The blaring stridencies of the saxophone punctuated the slur of feet on the polished floor, the shrill laughter of the women, and the deeper guffaws of the men.

And through it all ran a note unrestrained and daring; a little mad, perhaps, as if the more violent emotions were held in leash by the thinnest of threads.

Suspended from balcony and ceiling were hundreds of electric lamps enclosed in white shades emblazoned with dark green crocodiles. They cast a sinister tinge on the flushed faces of those who dined and danced below.

Currents of air fanned them into motion, and soon they were gyrating like imps on a gibbet.

In the centre of the floor had been erected a low, square dias approachable on each side by a flight of steps. There was nothing on the dias.

Waiters hurried from table to table. The odor of foods mingled with the exotic perfumes of the women. An incredible number of teapots were brought from the pantry and received with a wink or a grin; and when their contents were poured into the teacups that had accompanied them they were sipped with relish or swallowed with gusto.

Silver flasks began to twinkle on the tables. Bottles of spirits and wine, Scotch and gin, Burgundy and port and champagne emerged from the most unexpected places and were greeted with roars of approval. Ice tinkled in tall glasses and cocktail shakers flashed.

Convention and restraint were flung to the winds; liberty and license grew.

The scene was entirely new to Gail and she watched it, fascinated, as one watches a play on a theatre-stage. She was not yet part of it, but her fingers were on its pulse, so to speak, and she felt the throb and beat of it.

There was something else, though; something beneath the surface hilarity of the scene, not apparent to the eye.

She did not know what it was —a presentiment, perhaps—but she sensed it dimly, as one would sense the presence of a naked electric wire in a bar of iron. Something impended. What was it?

JUST then, a stout man with a round, red face broke away from the boil of humanity on the dance-floor and rolled toward her.

"'Lo, Baby!" he gurgled. "What you doin' all alone? 'Tain't right! A pippin like you. Come on, le's hop it a while."

Gail stared at him languidly.

"Beat it, Fat. I'm tied up already."

He swayed above her, moist and warm.

"No, you ain't! Come on, Kid!"

"Go 'way!" Gail blew a cloud of cigarette smoke into his face. "Go 'way and sit down or you'll fall. I'm not dancing with you."

The man's face, flushed with liquor, deepened in color. "Aw, come on, Red!" he whined. "Jim Beasley said I could have you. He said you'd dance with me. You got to!" He winked solemnly at her. "I got a bottle of real stuff. Come on, kid!"

His hot fingers touched her arm. For a moment Gail forgot herself.

"Go and sit down, you drunken beast!" she cried scathingly. "You are not fit to dance with anyone!"

"Drunken—beast!" the man echoed, in a slow rage, and his round red face swayed like a tipsy moon. "I'll show you. I'll show you——"

"What's wrong here?"

The voice came shrilly from behind the man and Gail was relieved to see Jim Beasley, resplendent in evening dress and diamonds.

Her relief quickly gave place to fresh dismay, however. There was something in Beasley's crooked eyes that frightened her.

"Li'l girl here wont dance," the fat man hiccoughed. "Says she's gotta date, but she ain't! Don't I know? Gettin' sassy, too. Hand it to her, Jim!"

Beasley gave Gail his up-and-down look.

"What do you think I have you here for, Burns?" he demanded raspingly. "What are you stalling for?"

"I got a date," Gail replied coolly. "A fellow I know asked me to wait for him."

"You are lying," Beasley snapped. "You are here to do as you are told. Either dance with Monty or get out!"

"Wait a bit, Jim. Wait a bit! This young lady is booked already."

GAIL'S emotions were varied as she saw Kessler's hard, whitish face appear over Beasley's shoulder. Blondy, grinning cheerfully, was behind him. Gail felt a sudden quickening of her pulses. Here was something definite.

Kessler wore a dinner jacket, and that quality of sinister elegance, of breeding grown rank, was emphasized by his spread of white shirt front.

As she looked at him she got an impression of strength and weakness. He reminded her of a tower of stone built on a bank of sand.

Gail laughed shrilly.

"Hello, Nick! Blondy was talking about you. Didn't I tell you, Jim?"

Beasley was mollified.

"All right," he grunted. "You are too late, Monty."

The latter thought differently, however.

"Not on your life, I ain't!" he shouted belligerently, swaying a little. "I got here first! Come on, li'l green girl!"

Kessler's eyes had not left Gail's face since first alighting upon it. They were small eyes, light blue in color, and shallow in expression. But as they fell on the fat man's round, red face they dilated a little and a dangerous hardness leaped into them.

"Stand back, you fool!" he said thickly.

His arm swung out and the man called Monty collided with the nearest dinner table. There came the crash of crockery and a precious bottle of wine. Two men rose to their feet, cursing, and the two very blonde women with them screamed. Those at the surrounding tables roared with delight—it wasn't their wine.

There is always a certain joy in being a bone of contention, the quality of the contestants' notwithstanding, and Gail was human enough to feel the thrill of it.

The next moment, she was swept onto her feet; a powerful arm en-

circled her shoulders and she was whirled out onto the dance floor.

Gail caught a glimpse of Blondy nodding reassuringly and of the man called Monty picking himself up out of the wreckage of the dinner table; then they were swallowed up by the crowd.

While they danced, during the intervals Kessler emitted a stream of conversational nothings to which Gail made the appropriate replies.

He had been drinking and the intimacy with which he danced sickened her. However, it provided her with an excellent opportunity to study the man, and she made the best of it.

Her judgment of him was confirmed. He was all front; there was no carrying power behind. Her faith in Blondy's scheme was renewed.

Meanwhile, the revelry had risen to a shrilled wilder pitch. As she whirled around the floor Gail was reminded of a movie interpretation of a Roman Saturnalia. Many of the dancers were the worse for liquor and they reeled and spun in a frenzy of movement unrelated to the stridencies of the orchestra.

One couple rolled on the floor, almost ripping the scant gown from the woman's back. A dozen others piled on top of them. Out of this tangle of silken legs and perfumed gowns rose a discord of tears and oaths, falsetto laughter and coarse jokes.

Higher and higher shrilled the music. The musicians were like fiends fiddling at a dance of death.

Those at the tables were in no better condition. All of them had liquor. Gail saw a woman scramble onto one of the larger tables and execute a frenzied fandango to an accompaniment of clapping by her seven fellow-revelers.

Glassware and dishes laden with food crashed right and left. A hullaballoo of applause burst forth from the surrounding tables.

One girl with a fine touch of genius cracked crockery over the bald pate of her fatuously grinning companion. A second made castanets of cutlery. A third beat upon an ice bucket with the drumsticks of a turkey.

Upon another table was enthroned a movie star of dark, exotic beauty. Hand in hand, a dozen or so of her companions pranced around the table, emitting whoops that would have shamed a young Sioux chief. There were no protests.

Grinning waiters cleared away the wreckage as fast as it accumulated. The mad "Twenty-fivers" would pay the bill.

THE scene affected Gail curiously. She recognized its madness which, moment by moment, rose to fresh improbable heights. But there was something else. That presentiment of events impending had never left her. It was stronger now.

She thought of it as an undercurrent of danger which, unsuspected by the revelers, ran faster and faster beneath the surface gaiety of the scene; an acceleration of forces which would presently break forth with devastating effect. Catastrophe —that was it!

"There's something coming!" she whispered to herself.

Her presentiment seemed to gather confirmation when, a moment later, Kessler whispered huskily in her ear:

"Beasley has locked the doors!"

The statement dismayed her. Why should Beasley lock the doors?

Kessler was becoming more intolerable with each moment. Gail looked up at him with smoldering eyes. His whitish face was flushed now. His eyes met hers with a fatuous grin and she forced herself to smile back at him.

She must smile, smile, smile, until she got what she had come for! Ugh! How she hated the man!

The music stopped suddenly, and so did the dancers—those of them that had wit enough left to do so. Gail and Kessler were near the foot of the broad staircase which led up to the balcony.

Before Gail knew what was happening to her Kessler had caught her up in his arms and was reeling up the staircase with her as if she were no more weight than a bundle of feathers.

Gail kicked furiously and struck Kessler in the face. He was undisturbed, however.

"Take it easy, Red! Nobody's going to hurt you!"

The staircase was crowded with revelers passing unsteadily up and down. They made way for Kessler, grinning and exclaiming with delight at Gail's predicament. None of them interfered, reading into her violent protestations merely a spirited acquiescence.

Gail abruptly ceased struggling and lay passive in Kessler's arms. If she was going through with this thing she must take the preliminaries easily.

For a moment she had a vision of the Gail Hollister of a week ago, cataloging antiques in a Los Angeles museum. The vision made it possible for her to smile up at him.

"Nothing slow about you, Nick!" she laughed.

His arms tightened again. "You red-headed witch, you!" he whispered huskily.

Kessler reached the balcony and picked his way between the crowded tables to one of the booths which bore a card with "Reserved" on it in prominent letters.

The booth immediately behind it bore a similar card, Gail noticed. This would be Blondy's doings, she reflected, and drew courage from the thought. All of the others were occupied.

There were two chairs and a table in the booth. Kessler deposited Gail on one of the chairs. A waiter hurried up, menu card and order blank in hand. Kessler asked for cocktails by their given name and with an air that proclaimed his contempt for the subterfuges popularized by the eighteenth amendment.

The liquor he had drunk already was inclining him to loquacity. He poked the bored waiter playfully in the ribs and introduced Gail to him as his "little green girl."

When the man had returned with the order and departed again, Kessler started to draw the thick curtains across the front of the booth. Gail stopped him.

"Leave 'em up for a while, Nick," she said casually. "Beasley is staging something down below and I want to take a look."

"S u r e thing," Kessler agreed. "Anything to please. Lots of time. Hot doings down below, eh? Have a cocktail, Red."

He pushed a glass toward Gail and took one himself. Gail let the glass stay where it was. There was a small potted palm in the booth. Whether it got there by accident or design she did not know, but it would come in handy, later on.

Her intimacy with Kessler during the last hour or so had been wellnigh unendurable. She wanted to adjust herself to the man by degrees. For this reason she had stopped him from drawing the curtains.

Just then Gail caught sight of Blondy picking her way toward the booth behind. Faithful Blondy!

Kessler was busy with his second cocktail at the moment and Gail caught the girl's eyes.

Blondy winked encouragingly and

entered the booth. The curtains were drawn to.

Gail drew a deep breath. Could she go through with it to the end?

CHAPTER XXIV

THE DANCE OF THE GREEN CROCODILE

AS Gail had said, Beasley was staging something down below.

The dancers were crowding back from the dias and the center of the floor, attendants of the roadhouse giving assistance to those who needed it.

When the center of the floor was clear, the lights were suddenly lowered and the hall was thrown into a semi-darkness that brought a ripple of surprise from the tipsy revelers. There followed a hush that contrasted sharply with the hilarity that had just ceased.

A minute passed. Then, with hair-raising unexpectedness, green flame burst out of the center of the ceiling and fell upon the dias below. Light of the same color flared up to meet it and in the twinkling of an eye the dias had become a lake of green fire.

A clever arrangement of spot lights and reflectors created the illusion, but in the darkened hall its effect was weird and rather terrible.

Complete silence prevailed. Once again, Gail was aware of that acceleration of hidden forces. A climax of some sort impended, but whether it was merely in the affairs of Kerry and herself, or in something else as well, she did not know.

The dias was some forty feet square. The light revealed it as being different in character from the first general conception. In the center of it was an oblong hole or well, some ten feet in width by thirty in length, the bottom of which was in darkness.

The attention of everyone in the hall, drunk or sober, was focused upon the dias and the oblong pit in the center of it. So quiet had the hall become that the silence could almost be felt.

Suddenly, the whir of a motor was audible; and then the orchestra began to play a weird and haunting melody that somehow made Gail think of the chanting of an ancient people rising up through the dusty halls of time.

It touched the spirit as with a ghostly hand. The tension mounted until it seemed as if the very atmosphere of the place must snap.

A sudden "Ahhhh!" of amazement breaking from the sobered audience relieved the strain.

Out of the pit was rising a monster of vast proportions. It was scaled like a reptile, dark green in color, and it had two red lamps for eyes.

Apparently, the monster stood on a section of the floor which could be lowered and raised like a stage in some of the newer theatres.

The section reached the top of the dias, the elevation of the monster stopped, and the astonished spectators beheld a gigantic and creditable reproduction of a crocodile. It winked its red eyes, stamped its feet, and shook its ugly snout.

A ripple of applause began, ascended in volume, then abruptly ceased.

The snout of the monster had opened. Out of it slid a girl: a lovely, fairy figure, straight from the garden of the gods. She was clad in a scant jade green scarf and jade green shoes were on her tiny feet. Her limbs and shoulders were dazzling white and her hair was black as jet.

A thunder of applause shook the hall. Women screamed with delight; men whistled and stamped their feet.

Gail recognized the girl as a noted New York dancer who had been on the coast during the past month. She

found a program on the table before her. Opening it, she read:

JIM BEASLEY
Presents
ARLENE DEANE
in
The Dance of the Green Crocodile.

THE music quickened and the girl began to dance. Her figure was as light as the motes in a sunbeam, as liquid as quicksilver. The dance had a sacrificial motif as intricately patterned as a mosaic, and the girl floated through it with a scintillating brilliance that held her audience spellbound.

Again the music quickened; so did the tempo of the dance. The girl clapped her hands, a trill of joy broke from her lips, and the green light turned blood-red, then gold, then brilliant blue, and jade green again. Her fairy body personified the youth and joy and beauty of all time.

Sheathed and tongued in colored flame, it whirled into so riotous an ecstasy of movement that the limitations of the flesh fell away from it and she danced like one come from the gods to gladden the hearts of men.

Meanwhile, Kessler had disposed of another cocktail and Gail, on her own account, had fed one to the potted palm. Kessler was quite pleasantly jingled by this. He had quickly lost interest in the presentation below, his eyes returning continually to Gail's copper-red head.

Reaching out now, he drew the curtain. Then he leaned across the table and put his hand on Gail's.

She met his swimming eyes steadily. Her hour had come and she was asking herself if she had the nerve to go through with it. His hands were cold and white. His pale face swayed a little; the expression of his light-blue eyes frightened her.

Then she looked at his mouth and jaw. No character! No strength! She felt comforted a little. The touch of his hand reminded her of Stark. Ugh!

The weakness of the plan she and Blondy had concocted between them was pitilessly clear to Gail now. Would Blondy in the booth behind be able to hear what Kessler might be persuaded to admit?

Beasley's presentation had sobered the revelers; even their applause was withheld until the dance should end, and the partitions between the booths were thin.

But Gail doubted the carrying power of Kessler's voice in his intimate moments. No! The whole scheme was impractical; a waste of time. She had been a fool to try it!

And then a curious thought came to her. It frightened her at first; then it gave her fresh hope. Hadn't Blondy been aware of this all along? She must have known that the din at the Green Crocodile would be deafening.

Was it her intention to swear to anything she, Gail, *said* Kessler admitted, whether she overheard him herself or not? But that would be perjury!

Was Blondy prepared to go to this length for the sake of getting back at Kessler? It looked like it.

Was she herself prepared to go to this length for Kerry? She thought for a moment, Kessler's hand still on hers. Yes, she was!

She would be a party to perjury for Kerry's sake. But could they make it stand in court? Well, the only thing to do was to try it.

Kessler spoke in maudlin tones.

"She's not bad, but she's got nothing on you, little red-head."

Gail twinkled at him. "Think so, Nick? I wonder if you do?"

His ardent eyes distended a little.

"Give me half a chance and I'll show you."

"What do you want?"

He leaned nearer.

"You and I are going to be pretty good pals, aren't we?"

"Maybe, Nick."

"What's the matter with us going together, li'l red-head?"

Gail withdrew her hand and lit a cigarette, coolly, deliberately. She was thinking swiftly. A glimmer of an idea broke through the fog in her mind. It promised well.

"G o i n g together, Nick?" she drawled. "What do you mean?"

Kessler winked.

"You're not particular, are you?"

Gail pretended a vast indignation.

"Aren't I? Let me tell you I'm an honest girl, and I work for my living!"

Kessler snickered. There was a hectic flush on his white cheeks now. A silver flask stood on the table. He poured a generous measure into a tumbler and swallowed it neatly. Then he pushed the flask toward Gail.

"Help yourself."

Gail moved it aside; her eyes narrowed.

"Come to the point, Nick. What do you want?" Then, in a louder voice: "Speak up, I can't hear you." This was for Blondy's benefit.

Kessler's eyes were like balls of fire.

"I want you, you red-headed witch! And I'm going to have you!"

He sprawled across the table toward Gail. She whipped up her cigarette. Its red-hot tip stopped an inch or so away from Kessler's ardent eyes.

"Not so fast, old-timer. Take it easy!" Then, in a slightly different toned voice: "Can you hear?"

"Hear? Sure I can hear?" Kessler grunted drunkenly.

But Gail was listening attentively for a signal of some sort from Blondy in the next booth. It came: a faint tap, tap, on the partition behind Kessler's head.

Gail's heart gave a bound. Blondy could hear, after all. If only Arlene Deane, the dancer, would hold her audience spellbound for another ten minutes!

Kessler, apparently, had not heard Blondy's tap.

THE orchestra was playing a tender love melody no louder than a summer breeze.

"The man that wants me," Gail stated coolly, "has got to come through."

"Thasso!" Kessler grunted. He made a vague gesture in the air. "Money, hey?"

Gail smiled and drew on her cigarette.

"You bet your life there's got to be money."

She paused and poured whisky from the flask into a tumbler and left it there.

"But there's got to be more than money, Nick."

"Yea?"

Kessler's head wagged from side to side. His eyes strayed to the liquor in the glass.

"Whaddoyou want, li'l green girl?"

Gail looked down at her hands.

"A ring, Nick," she said demurely.

He began to laugh fatuously, moisture drooling at the corners of his weak mouth.

"Marry you, eh! That's what you want, is it?"

Gail's hand rested lightly on his arm. She blew cigarette smoke into his eyes and smiled at him bewitchingly.

"Don't you want to marry me, Nick?" she asked softly.

Kessler gulped down the whisky Gail had poured out.

"Marry you! Sure I want to, you red-headed witch, you!" he cried in

an exultant whisper. "Be a fool if I wouldn't! Ain't got a wife any moo-ore!" he chanted.

"Speak louder, Nick," Gail cried petulently. "I can't hear you!"

He shot a look of suspicion at her; but his wits were fuddled and the girl's eyes were wide and candid, and whatever was in his mind quickly passed.

He repeated himself somewhat incoherently; then he sprawled across the table again, his hands reaching for Gail.

"Aw, come on, li'l red-head! Be a good li'l sport!" he pleaded.

But Gail drew back with a tantalizing laugh and whirled her glowing cigarette in front of his face.

"Naughty, Nicky, naughty!" she cried lightly. "Burny burn. You haven't got me, yet."

He drew back before the cigarette and Gail pursued him with the glowing end of it until she had him at a safe distance. She was thinking with all the hard concentration of which her keen young mind was capable.

Her glimmer of an idea was leading her to light. She must stress the money motif. The rapt silence of the dancer's audience continued. If only it might last a little longer!

"But I'm not forgetting the cash end of it, Nick," she went on deliberately. "That interests me as much as the ring. I want a name and I want the stuff to keep it up. And"—she paused for emphasis—"and I don't much care how I get 'em!"

KESSLER fumbled in the pocket of his dinner jacket, drew out a wallet, took from it a huge wad of bills, and slapped it down on the table.

"Eight hundred iron men!" he shouted thickly. "How zat?"

Gail turned up her dainty nose.

"You'll need more than eight hundred to carry me, Nick."

Kessler grunted.

"Tha's only chicken feed, ol' girl. Cig'rette money. I got—I got——"

He was stumbling solemnly over his words now.

"I got fifty thousand put where'll do the mos' good. And I got"—his voice dropped confidentially—"more coming!"

"Yea?"

The single drawled word was derisive. Its significance pierced the drunken fog clouding Kessler's brain.

"You don' b'lieve me, li'l green girl, huh?"

"I didn't say so, Nick. Where'd you get it all?"

Gail casually poured out another drink of the whisky and pushed it toward Kessler. He swallowed it neatly.

"Never min' where I got it," he growled, wagging his head. "I got it; tha's 'nough, isn't it?"

Gail sniffed cynically.

"Same old story, Nick. I heard it before."

She half rose to her feet. In a flurry of drunken haste he was up, forcing her down by the arms. He tried to embrace her and Gail touched his hand with the end of her cigarette.

Kessler reeled back with an oath and flopped down onto his chair.

"Sorry," Gail said, with a caress in her voice.

"Whaddoyou care how I got my money so's you get the spending of it?" he mumbled.

Gail lit another cigarette.

"Oh, I like to know what kind of a man I'm tying up with. I like to know if he's got—nerve."

"Nerve!" Kessler echoed. "Nerve!" The word roused a storm of indignation in him. "Nerve's my middle name!"

"I wonder."

His face crimsoned and he pounded on the table with his fist.

"Yes—nerve!" he shouted thickly,

and his wrath sobered him a little. "I'd be in a devil of a mess if I hadn't it! Nerve and a gun in my hand!" he added.

Gail's lip curled.

"A gun! To peddle a bottle of bootleg! And you talk of nerve!"

Kessler was furious. He waved his arms in the air.

"A bottle o' bootleg!" he snarled. "I brought in two 'boat-loads las' month! An' I got another coming!"

As he said this Gail felt as if fire were running through her veins. She could hardly hold herself still on the chair. A minute or two longer and she and Blondy would have it out of him!

"Bringing it in around here, Nick?" she asked, in a loud but casual voice.

Before he could reply a thunder of applause shook the Green Crocodile. It rose volume on volume until the ceiling rafters trembled.

Gail stared at the man on the other side of the table, sick at heart, but still smiling.

If the presentation was over her chances of success were gone. Blondy wouldn't be able to hear a word!

Kessler groped drunkenly for the curtains and parted them. Over the heads of the excited spectators Gail caught a glimpse of the dias.

Arlene Deane, the dancer, was prostrate before the crocodile which moved its snout up and down and from side to side as if it were a deity considering the acceptance in sacrifice of the lovely figure in front of it.

The audience broke forth into fresh expressions of appreciation and Nick dropped the curtain. Gail waited, shivering a little.

AS quickly as it had begun the applause ceased. A hush filled the hall again. The orchestra began to play a plaintive melody that reminded Gail of the whispering of falling leaves on an autumn day.

She had to clench her teeth to repress the sob of relief that rose to her lips. The presentation was not yet over!

"Bringing it in around here, Nick?" Gail found herself saying again, in the same hard and casual tone.

"Why?" Kessler's bleared eyes flickered a little, as with suspicion.

"Oh, I just wondered," Gail responded coolly. "They say stuff has been coming in around here. I thought maybe it was yours."

The suspicion faded out of his eyes. He snickered with tipsy boastfulness.

"Sure it was, li'l green girl!" he cried, slurring his words. "I got a load out there now."

"Have you!" Gail exclaimed admiringly. "Why don't you bring it in?"

He solemnly wagged his head from side to side.

"I'm gonna bring it in, soon's it's safe! I'll fool them sniff-hounds yet, I will! They can't put it over Nick Kessler!"

"I'll bet they can't, Nicky dear!" Gail cried.

She leaned nearer, blew smoke into his eyes, patted his hand, gave a little silver laugh.

"Why, isn't it safe?"

"Too much nosin' 'round."

"Nosing around, Nicky. What do you mean?"

"Whaddoyou wan' to know for?"

Gail's dark eyes seemed almost to melt into his.

"Aw, tell me, Nicky. It isn't that I want to *know*—a girl likes to feel her man trusts her! That's all."

"You red-headed devil!" he cried, in drunken ecstasy. "I'm comin' for you!"

He tried to scramble to his feet, but his legs were no steadier than his head was clear and Gail, perching herself on the top of the table, easily forced him down, and with the glow-

ing end of her cigarette an inch or so from his ardent eyes held him still.

"You stay there, old dear," she cried, with a twinkling laugh, "until you've told me the rest of it. I don't go with any man that doesn't trust me. Get that into your old fat head."

He grinned up at her fatuously. She saw the beastliness of the man, his corruption, his cowardice, the intemperance of his desire, and she could hardly refrain from flinging herself out of the booth. No, she must go through with it.

She could almost *hear* Blondy listening behind the partition.

"Daniels was sure you'd be afraid to tell me," Gail said softly.

"Daniels!" he mumbled, staring up at her. "Daniels—tell you what?"

GAIL gave a little throaty laugh.

"What he and you saw at the Conniston summer house the other night."

He stared at her with drunken incredulity.

"Daniels tol' you that?" he mumbled.

He shook his head as a dog shakes itself. His fuddled wits scented danger, but they were too far gone to grasp it.

Gail laughed lightly.

"He knew you'd be afraid to. Joe's got nerve, Nick. Nerve! I like a man like that!"

Kessler's fist crashed down upon the table.

"Like—that rat!" he bellowed, crimson of face and sobered. "'Fraid! The l—liar!"

"Well, what *did* you see?" Gail drawled.

She was swinging lightly on the edge of the table, puffing on her cigarette, laughing down at him, as lovely as Circe.

But her heart was hammering against her ribs. She could hardly trust herself to draw breath. The plaintive melody the orchestra was playing came to her as from a distance.

"I'll tell you what I saw, li'l green girl!" Kessler shouted in reckless maudlin tones. "The liar! I'll show you who's afraid! I'll tell you any ol' thing you wan' to know!"

He stopped to take breath. He meant what he said. Gail knew that he meant it, too. She had won. For a moment she experienced the ecstasy of victory. And then, in a flash, it was turned to the bitterness of defeat.

A whistle shrilled out in the hall below. It was followed by the crash of breaking windows. The effect upon Kessler was remarkable. His face went deathly white and he sprang to his feet with an oath. His eyes rolled in fear and his weak mouth fell open, giving his face an absurd, terrified expression.

Gail had slipped down from the table with a little sharp cry of distress. She knew what had happened. Kessler flung her aside and swept back the curtains.

Those on the balcony were on their feet, crowding back upon each other, consternation in their faces. The air was thick with curses; a woman screamed. Down below, the music had ceased.

Arlene Deane, the dancer, shrank back against Beasley's grotesque crocodile. The revelers surged back and forth in terror, formed into little knots, broke apart again, swept back upon one another like sheep lost in a mountain fog.

Whistles pierced the odorous air again. Men in plain clothes, but bearing the unmistakable stamp of authority, ran to and fro, uttering commands in sharp, staccato tones.

The revelers gave way before them like débris tossed on a rip tide.

Other men poured in through

broken windows, leaving guards behind them.

Kessler spun around upon Gail. He was sober now—sobered by his terror. His face had a purplish cast, his white hands shook, his big body quivered.

Gail, herself in despair, nevertheless was appalled by the extent of the man's collapse.

"I got to get out of this! I got to get out!" he sobbed. "They've raided the Croc!"

CHAPTER XXV

TRAPPED

BUT Gail could think of nothing but her own defeat. Defeat on the verge of success. Before that whistle had shrilled out she had been sure of Kessler. Now she was sure of nothing but the ruin of her plans.

She heard Kessler whispering hoarsely:

"We got to get out, Red! Stick by me! I know a way. If the cops get me, I'm done! You'll stick by me, Red?"

Gail did not answer him. She wanted to get away from the man, to breathe the cool, sweet air of the open night. Desperately she stared up and down the gallery, this end in view; and then all thought of her own escape was driven from her mind.

Kerry O'Neil was bearing down upon them, his lean face white with rage. Gail was in terror. Kerry would clash with Kessler. That would be the end—if the end had not come already!

Kessler's hand closed on her wrist, then; he pulled her out of the booth onto the balcony.

Kerry bored his way through the panic-stricken multitude rippling and eddying around the tables. Kessler did likewise, drawing Gail after him. The two men were approaching each other. A dozen feet separated them. In a moment they would crash.

Kerry's face was a mask of fury. They could hardly have met under worse conditions!

Half a dozen plain-clothesmen raced up the broad staircase.

Kerry was upon them. He hurled himself at Kessler. The latter, completely taken by surprise, reeled back with an oath. And at that instant every light in the Green Crocodile went out.

The darkness dropped like a black pall. A nerve-racking stillness followed upon it. There wasn't so much as a glimmer of light anywhere. No one could see his neighbor's face.

An audible shiver rippled through the roadhouse. A woman screamed; men gasped in a choking way. The interior of the Crocodile seemed to rustle with a hundred hidden terrors.

Suddenly a sharp command rang out. Another. Beams of light from electric torches threaded the darkness.

Gail was listening for sounds of conflict between Kerry and Kessler. She heard none. They must have become separated in the darkness. Thank Heaven! If only she could get Kessler away before the lights went on.

A hand closed on her wrist. It was Kessler's!

"Come on, Red!" he gasped.

She let him hurry her between the tables. A door opened. They sped down a narrow passage as black as pitch; through another door, and Gail found herself clattering down a staircase behind Kessler.

The man went as sure-footedly as a cat. Evidently this sort of thing was an old story to him.

Gail did not know where she was. So long as she could keep Kerry and this beast Kessler apart she did not care.

They emerged into the cool, clean

air on the open courtyard. A round, golden moon was rising above the ridge. Kessler stopped, peered cautiously around.

"You are going to stick with me, Red?" he growled unsteadily in Gail's ear. "You know what I mean!"

His hand tightened cruelly on her wrist.

"Yes, yes, Nick! Sure, Nick! We must get away, quickly. Oh! You are hurting me!"

"I like you, Red. I'll hang diamonds on your ears if you want 'em. But I'll wring your neck if you turn me down!"

"Yes, Nick."

"Come on, then, before they find the light switch. Step easy. My car's outside."

Kessler softly led her toward the main gate. A man was on guard there. They drew back into the shadow of a date palm.

The green electric sign above the roadhouse and the lamps placed around the grounds were in darkness, as well as the building itself. If the lights went on they would be seen.

Gail could hear Kessler muttering to himself.

"This way!" he whispered.

His voice shook with fear.

A cinder-path strange to Gail's feet brought them through banks of flowering shrubbery to a small door in the green board fence which surrounded the grounds. It was open. It was unguarded. They passed through the door.

Before them on the side of the road were such of the cars belonging to the patrons of the Green Crocodile as had not been able to find accommodation in the parking space provided within the courtyard.

Kessler hurried Gail toward one of the machines, a high-powered roadster.

"Get in! I'm taking the dirt road. They'd see us the other way!"

The engine purred and with darkened head and tail lights the car slid into the highway, nosed around the county sign that blocked the condemned dirt road, and shot like a dark rocket into the emptiness of the night.

The lights in the Green Crocodile went on and the electric sign flashed out.

Kessler did not speak. His hands were glued to the wheel, his eyes to the dim ribbon of road ahead. His lips were drawn back, giving him an expression of ferocity; but his teeth were chattering and his face had that gray, pasty look of one whose nerve is almost gone.

THE cool night air beating on Gail's hot face cleared her brain, gave her a more exact understanding of her position. She got Kessler away, but where was he taking her to?

She found herself in terror of the man again. The roadster was doing forty miles an hour. How was she to get away from him? Yet she must!

Just then the car rose perilously on a bump in the road, rocked dangerously for an instant, and threatened to overturn. Kessler screamed, bent low over the wheel, swung to the left. The car righted itself, straightened out. Its speed lessened.

Gail looked at Kessler curiously. The man was shaking from head to foot and his face had gone a greenish tinge; he was muttering incoherently to himself. Her fear of him gave way to contempt.

Absently groping in the seat of the car, Gail's hand encountered a metallic object with a wooden handle. A small screw-driver! What was it doing there? Then she saw that one of the screws which held the speedometer in the instrument board was loose. Probably Kessler had been trying to tighten it.

Gail found herself clinging to the tool tenaciously. She did not know why.

A moment later Gail became aware of a faint brilliance behind them. She glanced back and saw the headlights of another car. Her heart gave a bound. Was the car in pursuit of them, or were its occupants patrons of the Green Crocodile, like Kessler and herself escaping the wrath of the dry squad along the condemned dirt road?

She looked at Kessler surreptitiously. He was still muttering to himself. Behind, the headlights grew. The car was gaining.

Gail had an odd lightness of heart. No longer did she fear the man at her side. The screw-driver bothered her, though. She looked at it, frowning. Then she glanced up and saw the blackness of the cypress grove several miles ahead. It stood out against the skyline. Beyond it was the Casa de Ayer.

"The grove!" Gail whispered to herself.

She had a queer and thrilling feeling of expectancy.

The roadster purred on like a contented cat. Kessler accelerated and its purr grew louder. Some of his nerve had returned to him, but his face still had that greenish cast.

Gail was astonished to find herself trembling with excitement and by an inward sense urged on to an undetermined course of action. She must do something! What?

"The cypress grove—the screw-driver—the car behind—Kessler's terror."

The phrases revolved in her mind as if they formed a part of the key to a secret formula. There was a link missing somewhere. She could not get the proper association of ideas.

The roadster rushed on. The headlights behind had swelled a little. Kessler must quickly become aware of them.

Gail clenched her hands. What was this association of ideas that eluded her so persistently?

Suddenly, she had it!

Its daring and its promise thrilled her. She might yet turn defeat into victory. The cypress grove was some two miles ahead now. She had three minutes in which to execute her inspired plan. Her hand fell on Kessler's arm.

"Nick! There's a car behind—a police car! They are gaining on us!"

Kessler flung a terrified glance over his shoulder, gave a cry that was between a gasp and a groan and dropped his head lower over the wheel. His white face was a-gleam with perspiration.

"If they get me, I'm done!" he groaned.

The car hurled itself forward under the urge of fresh power.

"You can't beat 'em that way, Nick! Slow down! They're faster than we are!"

He took no notice of her. His lips were ashen.

"We can't beat 'em, you fool!" Gail screamed, digging her fingers into his arm. "Slow down! I know another way!"

He did not seem to have heard her. Ahead, the shadow of the cypress grove swelled like a thunder-cloud on a summer's day.

"Nick, you fool! Slow down! Do you want to see the inside of San Quentin?"

This got him.

"Mercy! No! It'll mean that, if they get me!"

"I know! It's a police car. They are gaining on us. They'll get us if we keep on! I know another way. We can beat 'em, Nick. Beat 'em!"

He checked the roadster a little.

"Beat 'em, you say! How? Quick, Red! If the cops get me——"

"They wont if you trust me!"

"Maybe!"

"You'll do what I say, Nick?"

Gail's voice was low, softly persuasive, charged with every bit of feeling she could cram into it.

"I'll wring your neck if you do me up!"

"Aw, Nick!" Gail stroked his arm. "How can you say that? Listen!" Her voice had sharpened. "That shadow ahead—see it?"

"Yes."

"It's a cypress grove. I know a road that leads into it. Know it well. Let me at the wheel, Nick. We'll slip into it."

"What then?"

"The cops'll shoot past. Never know we are there until it's too late. There's a trail down the cliff——"

"I know it!"

"Near the foot of it there's a cave. A secret cave, Nick—a swell place! You and me, Nick. We'll hide in it till dawn. They'll never find us. Let me at the wheel. Quick! We are nearly there!"

Kessler turned his eyes full upon Gail. They were sunk deep in their sockets and they reminded her of living eyes in a death's head. They seemed to scorch her, so fierce was the heat of his terror of the law.

"All right, slip over!"

He held the wheel steady while Gail crawled over his knees; then he slipped into the other seat.

THE bluff rushed down upon them like a dark monster of ancient legend. Gail riveted her eyes upon it; her hands were like iron on the wheel. The little road—she could not see it!

For an instant she was tempted to switch on the headlights. Better not! Ah! There it was! But she could hardly distinguish it against the dark background of conifers.

Could she do it? Touch and go if she did. And if they didn't—— She could feel Kessler's hot breath on her cheeks. The shadow of the bluff enveloped them. Now!

Deftly she swung the car to the left, jerked it to the right. It rose on two wheels. A mudguard crumpled like matchwood against the trunk of a cypress. The machine shot ahead, tilted on two wheels again, threatened to overturn.

It straightened out between the whispering conifers, and with the scream of brakes came to a shuddering stop in the heart of the grove. Gail shut off the engine. Kessler's hand was clamped like a vise on her arm.

"Let go, Nick! You are hurting me."

He did so. Then he took a deep breath and drew his hand across his gleaming forehead.

A streak of white and dark shadow swept past on the road outside.

Gail knew that she would collapse if she permitted slackening of the tension she was under before her end had been attained.

"Got a flash, Nick?" she demanded tersely.

"Yes."

"Let's have it. Quick!"

He fumbled about in the door pocket near him, took out a torch and handed it to her.

"Come on."

He followed her through the trees in silence. But when they had come to the head of the cliff trail he seized her by the wrist.

"Wha' did you bring that thing for?" he demanded.

Gail looked at the screw-driver in her left hand and laughed lightly.

"Now am I not the fool carrying that darn thing with me!" she cried. "I found it on the seat!"

He did not let go of her wrist.

"Listen here! If you try any monkey tricks you'll not see daylight again! Remember that!"

Gail widened her eyes at him. "Why, Nick!" she exclaimed. "What makes you talk that way? Am I not taking chances for you going down here?"

Her voice softened; she let her copper-red head incline toward his cheek.

"Nick, honey—I'd like to see the other man I'd do it for!"

He released her wrist, muttering to himself.

"Go ahead!"

GAIL swung the beam of the torch down the crooked trail she had ascended behind Kessler and Daniels some thirty-six hours before; she then commenced the rugged descent, Kessler following close behind her.

Thanks to the torch, they got over the rougher bits without mishap and several minutes later stopped in front of the subway-like depression that led down into the cave of terror in which Don Sylvestre Calderon had ended his life sixty years before.

And now, with the boom of the pit in her ears, the strength that had carried her this far deserted Gail. She began to tremble; her legs threatened to give way beneath her.

She felt that the feat of opening the door of that pit of horror was beyond her. And then she felt, rather than saw, Kessler's eyes upon her again.

"What sort of a hole is this?" he growled.

His voice steadied her; strength flowed back into her body.

"Why, Nick! You *are* queer!" she laughed, a little shrilly. "What's the matter? Don't mind the noise. It's the *swellest* place inside! Wait till you see it!"

His suspicions disarmed again, or partly so, Kessler followed her down the subway-like depression. Gail was careful to keep the light away from the brass plate on the door.

She found the padlock just as she had left it: the hasp thrust over the staple and held in place by the broken padlock.

Gail unfastened the door with trembling fingers and let it swing open. She held the torch so that its flare did not illumine the interior of the cavern.

The reek of the place sickened the girl. Again paralyzing physical weakness threatened to overcome her, but she fought it down. Nick stood at her shoulder, peering into the cavern. She saw his eyes narrow upon her again.

"Throw the light inside!" he growled.

Gail gave a little laugh.

"You are not *afraid*, are you, Nicky?"

He stepped closer, stood inside the doorway. Gail quietly stepped behind him.

For a moment he stood still, peering into the dark and roaring pit ahead; then he must have sensed her intention, for he suddenly whirled around with a diabolical fury on his white face. As he did so, Gail summoned every ounce of her failing strength and hurled herself straight at his broad chest.

He staggered back with a fearful scream, hands desperately clawing the air, lost his footing on the sloping floor of the tunnel, and went down into the darkness.

Gail had dropped the torch. She dragged the door to, groped for the hasp, and slipped it over the staple, securing it in place with the screwdriver.

Then her strength gave out and she fell in a heap at the bottom of the door.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DEATH PIT

SUCCESS is an excellent restorative, however, and Gail quickly came to herself again. She climbed onto her feet and leaned against the side of the depression, clasping her hands together.

"Kerry!" she whispered exultantly. "I have him!"

It certainly seemed so.

A fearful commotion was taking place on the other side of the door. Kessler was flinging his body upon it with tremendous force. The door shook and groaned and the screwdriver jumped and rattled against the hasp and staple. Would the staple hold? If it didn't—Gail shuddered at the thought.

The possibility of it not holding was too horrible to contemplate. Kessler, bent on revenge, would be as merciless as a tiger. She felt at the fastening. It seemed solid enough.

"Let me out, you devil!" Kessler screamed through the small barred opening below the brass plate. "Let me out! I'll kill you! You——"

A stream of unprintable obscenities followed.

Gail fumbled for the torch, but she did not light it. She did not speak. She just stood there in silence, smiling a little into the darkness. The staple would hold. Gail had a sort of intuitive confidence in it. There was plenty of time—now.

She heard the boom of the waters imprisoned in the cavern. The tide was low. At high water the pit would be an inferno. Indeed, it was that already.

A little while passed. Still Gail remained silent. Kessler continued to hurl himself at the door and to befoul the night with obscene vituperations through which there now ran a piercing note of terror.

The rock at Gail's back quivered beneath the subterranean pounding of the incoming tide. She heard the snarl and hiss of the tortured waters. Gail waited, still smiling into the darkness.

"Red—let me out! This terrible hole! It'll kill me! There's things—alive—crawling in it!" A scream. "For God's sake!"

Gail waited a minute or two longer; then she turned the flare of the torch full upon his face, white and ghastly and terrible in the square opening in the door. There was foam on his lips and a frenzy of terror in his eyes.

Gail remembered her reflection that a day and a night spent within it might drive a man mad. She studied the wretched face before her.

No, Kessler hadn't come to the end of his rope yet. It didn't matter. There was plenty of time.

"Red," he whispered. "Let me out! I can't stand it! What do you want?"

"The tide is coming in, Kessler." She spoke as Gail Hollister now. "It should fill the cave in five hours."

This was untrue, but Gail doubted Kessler's knowledge of the fact.

"What! The tide!" His cry ended in a scream.

Gail extinguished the torch. In the depression the darkness was like a velvet curtain. She did not reply.

The man threatened, pleaded and blasphemed, by turns. Then he hurled himself upon the door again and rammed it until its ancient timbers creaked and groaned. But to no purpose. The staple held true. Kessler began to sob like a woman.

"Let me out! Let me out! Let me out!"

Ten minutes passed.

Gail shot the light into Kessler's face again. Its expression was pitiable.

"Whadoyou want?" he moaned.

Gail held the light steady for a moment, blinding him.

His face, framed in the opening of

the door, made her think of some unhappy wretch confined in a dungeon of the middle ages.

"Whadoyou want, Red? I'll do anything if you'll only let me out! It's killing me!"

"It will unless I let you out," Gail said coolly. "You can't break down the door. Your body will go out on the tide."

"God help me!" the man whimpered. "I'll do anything you want, Red!"

"Do you know who I am?"

"No, no! Who are you?"

"Gail Hollister."

HIS eyes started from his head.

"That—red-headed girl—O'Neil's girl—you!"

"Yes. I heard you and Daniels talking here yesterday afternoon. It was not yet midnight. I followed you up to the Green Crocodile. I lost out there, Kessler—but I have you here!"

Gail's voice rang with a note of cold fury.

"You cowardly beast! You'd let an innocent man hang for a crime he didn't commit! Well, you are here and here you stay until you agree to tell Deputy Sheriff Bartlett what you and Daniels saw at the summer-house the night Dimity was killed!"

The man's face convulsed with fresh rage.

"By God!" he screamed. "I wont! I'll see you——"

"The tide is rising, Kessler. I'll leave you to think it over."

Gail snapped off the flash, turned, and started up the depression.

"Come back, Red! Come back! Don't leave me in this hell-hole!" the man screamed.

Gail's purpose in leaving him was two-fold. If the man was going to "break," as she devoutly prayed, solitude would wreck him quicker than anything else.

And if he did "break" she would need a witness. Her unsupported word would be worthless.

She believed there was just a chance that she might find a car going to or coming from the Green Crocodile along the condemned road. A police car, perhaps, or a stray reveler seeking to escape the consequences of his transgressions.

If there wasn't, she would drive to the Casa de Ayer in Kessler's car and get Doctor McEwan.

But when Gail had come up the trail to the road she was relieved to see a pair of headlights bearing down upon her from the direction of the Green Crocodile. The car was traveling fast, but she ran out in front of it and waved her arms, a slender, gem-like figure in the green georgette.

The machine, a roadster, slowed down, smothering her in dust, and stopped. A young man leaped out and ran toward her.

"Gail Hollister!" he shouted incredulously.

It was Perrin, the reporter!

"What are you doing here?" he cried, seizing her hands.

He ran his eyes over the green georgette, now sadly crumpled.

"Lord!" he whistled. "What's all this? Where *have* you been? We've been looking for you all day."

Gail told him, in a hurried sentence or two. He looked at her in admiration, then with astonishment and wonder in his eyes.

"The Crocodile!" he cried softly. "You must think a lot of this man O'Neil, Gail Hollister!"

There was a note of pain in his voice which escaped Gail.

"I do," she said simply.

"I've just come from the Crocodile," Perrin hurried on. "I got word of the raid and I skipped the beginning of the inquest to get in on it."

"The inquest! I thought it was called for yesterday."

"It was. But you were missing

and Bartlett had it postponed until tonight. The coroner was late getting down so it was delayed again. It's on now."

"You were at the Crocodile," Gail cried. "Kerry was there. Do you know if he got away?"

"O'Neil gave himself up. The car he was in went on ahead of mine. He should be at the house now. Best thing he could do, too. He should have done it at first. This man Kessler—pretty slick, getting him down there! Do you suppose he'll talk?"

"He must!" Gail asserted. "And he must identify Stark as the man who killed Dimity! Come on."

They found Kessler with his face framed in the opening in the door. As Gail flashed the light upon him she was reminded again of a death's head, so ghastly was the man's expression.

For a moment she was tempted to pity him; then she remembered Kerry. Perrin stood close to the wall of the depression so that Kessler could not see him.

The man's lips were moving soundlessly. Then he began to whisper something. At first they could not hear what he was saying. Then his utterance grew louder.

"Let me out, for the love of God!" he was sobbing, over and over.

Gail pressed nearer.

"Are you ready to tell what you saw the other night?"

The wretched man fell silent. Gail kept the torch steady, its white beam full on his twitching face.

Across it suddenly broke a tidal wave of hate and fury, and from his lips poured so scorching a stream of vituperation that Perrin started away from the wall with a low exclamation of anger. Gail restrained him with a touch of her hand.

This outburst was abruptly silenced. During the last minute or two the waters imprisoned in the cavern had been comparatively quiet. But now they broke forth into a snarling, hissing, booming tornado of sound that shook the cliff.

Through the opening in the door poured the odor of corruption, and Kessler whirled around as if he feared some foul hand were reaching out to drag him down into the pit behind.

Gail shot the flare of the torch past his head so that he might fully realize the nature of his prison.

He gave a scream and flung himself upon the door, beating at it with his fists.

"Yes, I'll tell—anything! I saw him do it! Let me out!"

"You'll make a statement?"

"Yes! Yes!"

Gail uttered a cry of thankfulness. Perrin, at her shoulder, gave a little sharp "Ah!" of delight.

"I want to know what you and Daniels were doing at the summer-house the night Dimity was killed," Gail said clearly. "I want to know what you saw. Tell me everything."

"Let me out—first!" Kessler whispered.

"No."

KESSLER moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue.

For a moment he seemed to have lost the faculty of speech. Then, in low and sullen tones, he began:

"Joe Daniels and I were to bring in a boat-load of bootleg liquor early Wednesday morning. We had a pile of driftwood heaped up near the Casa de Ayer. If we lighted it, Swanson was to run into a cove down near the Crocodile. If we didn't, he was to stay out.

"Around midnight we went up to signal Swanson to come in. Just as we got near the place where the driftwood was, we saw three men running along the beach with flashlights, as if they were looking for someone. They were flashing every shadow and cave

along the cliff and Joe and I were so caught that we couldn't get up or down the beach without being seen.

"The men looked like cops and we knew we'd have to talk if they found us—the last thing we wanted.

"There was a trail near us. It led up the cliff. We didn't know just where it went to, but it was the only way out and we took it. The moon had gone behind a cloud so they didn't see us.

"There was a summer-house at the top of the trail. At first we thought there was nobody in it; then we saw an old man sitting there. He looked as if he were waiting for someone.

"We were just going to sneak off along the cliff when another man came out of an olive grove behind the summer-house. He looked around as if he wanted to be sure nobody was watching him. We were in the shadow of a cypress, so he didn't see us. Then we saw that he had a piece of iron pipe in his hand.

"Well, he walked into the summer-house, the old man started up, and the other man cracked him over the head with the pipe. Then he sneaked off and so did we. That's all."

"You saw the man's face?" Gail asked tersely.

"Yes. We were pretty close to him."

"You could identify him?"

"I s'pose so. I don't know his name. Aren't you going to let me out of this hole now?"

"Not yet, old-timer," Perrin drawled, coming forward. "We want a written statement from you, signed and witnessed."

Gail saw the blood rush to Kessler's haggard face; his teeth bared. It flashed upon her that he had hoped to deal with her alone. But Kessler was beaten; his flare of defiance died.

"All right," he gasped. "You have me."

Perrin took notebook and fountain pen from his pocket and while Gail held the torch so that he could see what he was doing, wrote swiftly.

"Listen to this, Kessler," he said presently.

> I, Nick Kessler, declare that Joe Daniels and I planned to bring a boatload of bootleg liquor some time Wednesday morning, August 26th, and that toward midnight, Tuesday, August 25th, we went up to a beach near the Casa de Ayer to light a signal fire. I further declare that to avoid questioning by deputy sheriffs who were then on the beach, we climbed the cliff trail which leads to the summer-house, in the grounds of the Casa de Ayer, and that there we saw a man, whose name we do not know, club an old man on the head with a piece of iron pipe. I further declare that we withheld this statement from the authorities to protect our own interests, and that I now make it of my own free will without the coercion of anyone.

"How's that, Miss Hollister?" Perrin asked pridefully.

"Splendid!" Gail cried.

She was too overjoyed to say more. Perrin thrust the notebook and the fountain-pen through the opening in the door.

"Sign it, Kessler. And make it legible. Hold the light so he can see, Miss Hollister."

Gail did so.

Kessler sullenly wrote his name and handed the book and pen back to Perrin.

The latter then witnessed the statement. Gail followed his example, her fingers trembling so that she could scarcely hold the pen.

Her task was done! She wanted to laugh, to shout, to dance, to make some extravagant demonstration of her happiness.

Perrin tore out the statement and pocketed it.

"I don't suppose you have a gun, Kessler, but you'd better stick your hands up and keep 'em up."

Perrin opened the door.

"Come on—your hands up!"

Kessler stumbled out into the beam of light from the torch, eyes on the ground. Gail thought of a whipped dog as she looked at him. Perrin went through his pockets, but he was unarmed. The young man shut the door.

"Kessler," he said sternly. "You are going to the Casa de Ayer with us. And when you get there you are going to stand by this statement you have made—every word of it—and you are going to pick out the man you and Daniels saw kill old Dimity. He'll be there. Understand, Kessler?"

The man nodded sullenly.

"Up the trail to my car. March!"

CHAPTER XXVII

THERE HE IS!

WHEN Perrin drove up to the Casa de Ayer some fifteen minutes later, Gail saw that every window was ablaze with light. A dozen or more cars were parked in front of the house. How different it looked from when she had first seen it six nights before!

Atmosphere being largely a quality of the imagination, she supposed that once they had settled this matter of Conniston's and Dimity's death much of its dark glamor would vanish.

The front door was ajar and they entered, sending Kessler, sullen and passive, before them. Voices came from the library, the door of which stood open. They passed down the hall and paused outside the library. The room was packed. The inquest was not yet over.

A dozen staid and earnest men were seated along one wall—the coroner's jury. Their tired faces expressed their weariness of the formalities of the law. Behind the library-table sat an elderly bearded man with shrewd eyes—the coroner. Besides the coroner and his jury, nearly a score of people were packed into the room: Mrs. Wessels, Stark, Doctor McEwan, Conrad Gill, and his son, Victor, Bartlett, Decker, several reporters, and half a dozen other men.

Kerry O'Neil was there, also, a look of defiance in his dark eyes. He was handcuffed and a deputy stood at his side. Gail was furious. She wanted to announce their presence at once, but Perrin restrained her.

"Wait!" he whispered. "Something doing. Let's hear it."

The room was quiet—strangely so. Something tense and expectant was expressed in every face. Gail thought of the man who had died within its sombre walls. His spirit seemed to brood down upon the gathering from the shadowy beams above.

Her heart began to race. She felt Perrin's hand tighten on her arm. A rustling of papers was audible; then a voice called:

"Dr. Wallace McEwan."

The scientist came forward. The oath was administered and he took a vacant chair near the table, facing the jury.

"You have been investigating the death of Colonel Conniston independently of the sheriff's office, Doctor McEwan?"

"I have."

"On whose behalf?"

"Miss Gail Hollister's."

"Do you know where Miss Hollister is?"

"I do not."

"You have discovered evidence bearing upon the death of Peter Dimity?"

Doctor McEwan fingered his neat brown beard.

"Not directly. My information has to do with the motive which resulted in the death of Colonel Conniston. It is connected with the death of Dimity only in so far as the two murders are related. They are related, of course."

"What is the nature of your evidence?"

"Well, I believe I have discovered how the combination of the vault came into the possession of the man who brought about Colonel Conniston's death and who, I presume, killed Peter Dimity."

Silence again.

Gail crept a little nearer the open door. Her eyes fell on Stark. His heavy face was white and tense. She guessed what emotions were rioting in his heart. Well, his hour had come!

Then her eyes fell on Kerry and they grew humid with tenderness. Dear Kerry! *His* hour had come, too! Their hour! Her heart was singing.

"Let us hear your evidence, Doctor McEwan," the coroner said.

"My evidence is rather disappointing," Doctor McEwan began, in his clear, cultured voice. "It is interesting as an explanation of a puzzling angle of the case, but it does not indicate who killed Colonel Conniston and Dimity, though it may be of value in that respect later on.

"Let us consider the arrangement of the room. Colonel Conniston had *at least* three visitors on the night he was killed. They were Mr. O'Neil and Messrs. Victor and Conrad Gill."

Doctor McEwan inclined his head toward the latter and Mr. Gill bowed blandly in return.

"They will remember the arrangement of the room as it was then, no doubt. With your permission, Mr. Coroner, I shall make one or two changes."

DOCTOR McEWAN turned his chair toward the table, drew up another chair and placed it alongside the one on which he had been sitting. The table had not been moved, so the position of chairs and table was now the same as it was when Conniston was killed.

McEwan drew the attention of his audience to this fact; then he sat down on one of the chairs.

"We shall assume that the man who murdered Conniston sat in one of these chairs chatting with Conniston and that he asked the latter to let him see the famous intaglios. Conniston consented and went to the vault. The vault is some six or eight feet behind me. I cannot see it."

Doctor McEwan now went to the vault. Its door was in shadow. He turned on the drop light and the combination dial stood out in sharp relief. McEwan went back to the table.

"I must disturb you, Mr. Coroner," he said. "There are two articles in that drawer which I require."

The coroner drew back his chair.

McEwan opened the drawer and took out of it the Venetian hand mirror and the powerful lens, both of which had been on the table when Gail found Conniston's body.

McEwan closed the drawer and sat down on one of the chairs on the other side of the table. He then took up the mirror in one hand and the lens in the other.

"We shall assume that Conniston is at the vault. Very well. My back is toward him. I cannot see the vault, so I hold the mirror thus," —suiting his actions to his words— "and the combination is reflected in the glass.

"I can see the numerals, but I cannot decipher them—so I use the lens. It is a powerful instrument; my eyes are fairly keen, and I can just make them out.

"Still assuming Conniston to be at the door, I see him turn the combination to the right to 32, left 71,

right 49, left 18. The combination of the vault, gentlemen!

"I drop the mirror and lens, take out my fountain pen, this scrap of paper. I write the figures down, blot them on the corner of this writing pad, thrust the paper into my pocket—so!"

Still suiting his actions to his words:

"All this while Conniston is opening the door. It is done! Conniston turns around and I am casually examining the workmanship of this excellent Venetian mirror. That is all, gentlemen."

The library might have been empty, so still was it when Doctor McEwan had done.

For perhaps ten seconds every one in the room stared at him with blank astonishment in their faces. This moment of silence was a fitting prelude to the scene that followed. Perrin, with an eye for the dramatic, chose it for their entrance into the room, and propelled Kessler before them.

"Pick out the man who killed old Dimity!" he shouted in a ringing voice.

The command cracked like a pistol shot in that surcharged atmosphere. But it was the appearance of Gail in the green georgette that brought every one in the room to stand—save the coroner, who alone maintained his sense of dignity.

Kessler's sullen eyes swept the group.

"There he is!"

"Involuntarily, Gail's eyes sought Stark's white, tense face. And then, with feelings of amazement to which she was incapable of giving any expression whatever, she saw that Kessler was not pointing at Norman Stark.

Kessler was pointing at Victor Gill, son of the diamond merchant.

GAIL never ceases to look back upon the climax of that hectic night with the sensations of one who has passed through a sort of earthquake. Certainly, her feelings at the moment were those of one beneath whose feet the earth is rocking!

For half a minute or so there was dead silence. A pin might have been heard to drop. Even the function of breathing seemed to have ceased.

Victor Gill had become the target of every eye. But strange as it may seem Victor Gill, outwardly at least, was less disturbed than any of them. His pale, hawk-like face neither colored nor whitened; his dark eyes were as hard as flints. He stood as still as a marble statue.

Gail had only a vague recollection of what immediately followed. Pandemonium broke loose in the library. Bartlett, his men, the jury, and the newspaper reporters swept down upon her and Perrin and Kessler in a tidal wave, flooding them with cross-currents of q u e s t i o n s, demands, exclamations.

Somehow, Kerry O'Neil found his way to her side, put his handcuffed hands upon hers. The coroner pounded for order.

At last the room grew still. She heard Bartlett request a twenty-four hour adjournment of the inquiry. The request was granted, and then Bartlett, a little grimmer than ever, took charge of the situation again and also of Victor Gill when Perrin and Gail and Kessler had had their say.

For three hours, alone with Bartlett in one of the bedrooms, Gill withstood the deputy's merciless cross-examination.

Bartlett had ideas of his own upon the gentle art of extracting confessions from tight-lipped malefactors, and he tried every one of them upon Gill.

But the man's composure was

adamantine. Bartlett could get nothing out of him. And then the deputy played his trump card.

Perrin had suggested that Joe Daniels be found and that he be "persuaded" to support Kessler's statement. Bartlett had leaped at the suggestion and, not being quite himself yet, had humble-mindedly complimented Perrin on it.

To Decker had been assigned the task of finding Daniels. Kessler had then sullenly admitted that Daniels had been at the Green Crocodile and Decker got in touch with the dry squad.

Daniels, it turned out, had been arrested on general principals. Needless to say, Decker tackled the job of getting a statement out of him with gusto.

Thus it happened that toward dawn the door of the room in which Bartlett was attempting to "break" Gill was flung open and Joe Daniels was propelled inside.

Decker followed, closing the door behind him. The little man was trembling from head to foot; his face was ghastly and his lips were twitching.

Decker looked pleased with himself.

"That's him!" Daniels croaked. "That's the man we saw kill Dimity!"

There was dead silence for a moment. Daniels, pointing a shaking finger at Gill, was like an accusing spectre risen from the tomb. Bartlett and Decker watched and waited.

The expression of Gill's face changed curiously. The skin seemed to whiten and tighten over the bony structure as if someone were drawing it from behind. His face was like a mask that hid all the devilish emotions of the human heart. He took a step forward, his eyes smoldering, his clenched hands upraised.

"Back there!"

Gill stared at the weapon that had leaped into Decker's hand. Then his arms dropped; his face grew composed again.

"All right," he said coolly. "You have me. I did it. I'll make a statement."

The exultant detectives hurried him downstairs to the library. The stenographers were still there. Indeed, so intense was the interest of those who had heard Kessler's dramatic accusation that every one of them had remained.

Perrin, Gail, Kerry, and Doctor McEwan were together on the little balcony; they reentered the room. The hum of conversation had ceased as Bartlett and Decker thrust Victor Gill into the library.

A little dapper figure stumbled toward them. It was Conrad Gill.

The diamond broker had lost every shred of his amazing conceit, his bland complacency. He looked old and broken. His white hands fluttered out toward his son like frightened birds.

"Victor!" he whispered.

Bartlett pushed him aside and led his prisoner to the chair in front of the table at which the coroner sat.

"Let's hear it!" he said curtly.

The stenographers fluttered the leaves of their notebooks. For a moment the room was quite still.

AND then, in a flat, monotonous voice, Victor Gill began his statement.

"I saw the Conniston intaglios for the first time at the Panama California Exposition in San Diego ten years ago. But I had read of them and I knew the history of every one of them long before that. And I wanted them.

"My father did not know, he could not have understood. My father is a merchant, not an artist.

None of you, for that matter, can understand what those stones meant to me.

"They were food and drink, body and soul, life and death; they had more beauty in their green hearts than anything else in the world. They had living fire in them. I wanted to hold them, to press them to my lips, to worship them. You think I am mad: you do not understand.

"Conniston said he would sell them, but I knew that he was lying. I knew that no man who had possessed those divine stones as long as he could ever sell them. I determined to have them for myself, somehow. I had not enough money to buy them and my father, as I have said, is a merchant, not an artist.

"We came down last Sunday, only to find, as I had expected, that Conniston had changed his mind. But he said he would let us see the stones, and he went to the vault and began to turn the dial. And then I saw my chance.

"This mirror was lying on the table in front of me. Conniston had received it from Hart & Company, the antique dealers, that day. Doctor McEwan has described how I used it to get the combination. My father was examining those curtains at the window and he did not see what I was doing.

"When Conniston showed us the divine intaglios I could hardly control my desire. Nothing could have kept me away from them now! But of course you cannot understand.

"We got up to go. I made a pretense of examining the curtains and drew back the bolt which held the window, hoping that it would not be noticed before I returned. We left, then.

"That fool O'Neil held us up, as if I should have let him take the stones had we had them! We registered at the hotel in the village and went up to our rooms.

"About one o'clock I came down and went out. There was no one around, but I found an old Ford car parked near the hotel. It was just what I wanted. I drove out there and entered by that window, which was still unbolted.

"I started to open the vault. And then Conniston came into the room. Perhaps he had seen the desire in my face; perhaps he had seen me draw back the bolt. I do not know. We struggled and his body went limp in my arms. I thought he had fainted and I began to tie him up. And then I saw that he was dead.

"That is all, except that I heard the man Dimity tell Miss Hollister that he knew who had killed Conniston. A lie, for Conniston died of heart failure. But, it was necessary to remove Dimity."

The monotonous voice ceased and Victor Gill stared casually around the room; his dark eyes calmly met the accusing faces about him. There was no emotion in his expression, merely a vague regret, and something furtive and calculating. Not so much as a whisper of sound broke the stillness of the room. And then, suddenly, Norman Stark's voice cracked like a whip.

"The intaglio emeralds—where are they?"

Victor Gill smiled thinly.

"I don't know where they are. They weren't in the vault. Somebody got there before me."

"What!"

The cry came simultaneously from Stark, Bartlett, and Kerry O'Neil.

"You are lying!" Bartlett shouted.

"I am not lying," Victor Gill said evenly. "I never lie. The intaglios, I tell you, were gone. Somebody got there before me. Moreover, I left the vault *open*, not closed, as you found

it. Somebody opened it before I got there. And somebody *closed it after I left!*"

There was in this extraordinary statement a ring of truth that convinced every one in the room against their wills. Nobody spoke. Even Bartlett was at a loss for words. The tension slackened; they were off-guard.

Victor Gill saw his chance and took it.

Decker stood near him, his arms folded across his chest. The bulge of his automatic showed at his hip pocket. They had not handcuffed Gill and he suddenly flung himself upon the man, wrenched the pistol from his pocket, and put it to his own head.

There was a crack, a scream, and a curling feather of smoke. Victor Gill pitched to the floor, writhed, and lay still.

The case for the state was complete.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE HOUSE OF TOMORROW

WHEN Kerry had taken Gail up to her room immediately after the suicide of Victor Gill she felt as if she could never sleep again. But toward ten o'clock she found herself opening her eyes; they had been tightly closed in slumber for nearly four hours.

Curtains were drawn across the window, but pencils of sunlight crept in here and there and it was one of these, falling upon Gail's eyes, that had awakened her. She was rested; her mind was clear.

So Stark hadn't killed Conniston and Dimity, after all, and Victor Gill had, was her first thought. It had seemed too fantastic for belief; but now she knew that it was true. Gill had demonstrated its truth in a manner that left no room for doubt. She had a vision of that still figure on the floor, that upcurling feather of smoke.

And then the vision faded out of her mind, as an evil dream does, and smiling a little she began to think of Kerry. Surely it was a miracle, this tender thing that had come to pass! She lay quite still, bathed in the radiance of her thoughts, her body seeming to float on a sea of illusion.

There came a gentle knock on the door. Mrs. Wessels put in her round and shining face and followed it up with the vast bulk of her body.

"'Ow are you, dearie?" she inquired commiseratingly.

Gail was all right, but she didn't say so. She was staring at the graceful bronze vessel in Mrs. Wessels' arms.

"Where on earth did you get *that?*" she exclaimed.

Mrs. Wessels sniffed.

"Another of them Dimity urns, Miss 'Ollister. I found it in 'is room. He must have 'ad one for 'is wife and one for 'imself—when 'e needed it. No wonder there's deaths in a 'ouse when them as lives in it keeps coffins and corpses by them! Will you 'ave your breakfast in bed, dearie? A nice bit of bacon and a fried egg."

Gail was thinking, but she answered swiftly.

"No. I'll come down."

She slipped out of bed and Mrs. Wessels left the room.

Gail dressed quickly in white and green. The crumpled georgette gown lay on a chair and she hung it up in the clothes closet. It had served her well, but she never wanted to see it again. Or green georgette, either, for that matter: it would always remind her of Kessler. She must get Blondy a new gown.

In the future she was going to see a lot of Blondy. Her experiences during the past week had given her a

contact with life which she would never have had in the rarified atmosphere of the Westcoast Museum. Her life was full, rounded, and complete. Kerry had completed it.

She went downstairs. Kerry and Doctor McEwan were at breakfast in the dining-room. There was no sign of Stark.

Kerry ran to meet her and promptly kissed her once, twice, thrice, and made no bones about it, either, though Gail was properly embarrassed. Then he sat her down at the table between himself and Doctor McEwan.

Mrs. Wessels appeared with fruit and cereal.

"I suppose congratulations are in order," Doctor McEwan murmured with a twinkle.

Gail blushed; or rather her blushes deepened.

"I don't know. Kerry takes so much for granted."

"Doctor McEwan has promised to be best man," Kerry observed complacently.

Gail changed the subject.

"Have you found the intaglios?"

McEwan sipped his coffee.

"No, we haven't, my dear."

"What about Stark?" Gail went on. "I am still sure it was he that Mrs. Wessels and I saw in the moonlight."

"So am I."

"Do you think he took the intaglios?"

"No. I think they were taken before Stark got here. And before Gill got here, too. Stark was after something else."

"What?"

DOCTOR McEWAN laughed genially.

"We have evidence to show that Stark was here the night Conniston was killed; you and Mrs. Wessels saw him in the moonlight; that man in the village saw a Druid sport roadster speed by in this direction; we know that Stark owns a Druid such as this man saw; and we have the carbon paper impression of the letter Colonel Conniston wrote to him. Very well.

"We decided from the wording of this letter that its subject was Conniston's will, though it did not actually say so. Stark was on bad terms with his uncle; we assumed that Conniston had expressed this antagonism in his will, that he had notified Stark to this effect, and that Stark intended to plead his cause in person on the 23rd or the 24th.

"Very well. Stark, Mrs. Wessels informed me, has a liking for night driving. Some people have. Perhaps he couldn't get away earlier. Anyhow, I am going to assume that Stark drove down from Los Angeles on the evening of the 23rd, that he got here about three a. m. on the morning of the 24th, saw a light at the library window, found the window open, entered, and discovered his uncle dead on the floor —just as Victor Gill had left him.

"I don't suppose he was greatly concerned. He went to the vault which Gill had left open, found the will, and read it. The document didn't favor him as he thought it should, and since it was a holograph will, he decided that it must disappear. And disappear it did. So did the correspondence he had had with his uncle concerning it.

"Stark then closed the vault, bolted the French windows, and left the house by way of the trap in the cellar. I suppose he followed this course to divert suspicion from himself should the police discover that he had been on bad terms with his uncle.

"Perhaps he intended to give the impression that the crime was an 'inside job.' He ascended the cliff by way of the summer-house trail.

You, Gail, and Mrs. Wessels saw him in the gardens as he made his way back to his car."

"It must have been Stark who phoned the sheriff's office," Gail declared.

McEwan nodded.

"I imagine he wanted to get back here as soon as he could. He would be anxious to know what conclusions the police had come to.

"But he knew he would have to explain his appearance if he came before they notified him what had happened, so he invented that story about the telephone call and phoned the sheriff's office himself to support it.

"Rather clever, I thought. The move tended to turn suspicion away from him, too. Fortunately, you and Mrs. Wessels saw him in the moonlight, Gail."

"Pretty good!" Kerry O'Neil cut in. "But how are you going to prove —about the will, I mean?"

McEwan smiled.

"I had a little talk with Stark early this morning and I indicated to him pretty much what I have said to you. I asked him if he preferred that the will should reappear or that certain evidence which we possess—the carbon and the statement of the man in the village—should be turned over to Bartlett."

"Great!" Kerry exclaimed. "We have him there!"

"It seems so," Doctor McEwan agreed. "He gave me the will two hours ago. He said he *found* it between the pages of Mather's 'Ancient and Medieval Antiques,' a book Conniston used a good deal."

McEwan took a document from his pocket and passed it to Kerry; his brown eyes were twinkling.

"Apart from bequests to Dimity and Mrs. Wessels," he went on, "the estate—some eight hundred thousand dollars, including the intaglios—is equally divided between Stark, you, and the Westcoast Museum. 'To the son of my good friend, John O'Neil,' Conniston puts it. A handsome wedding present, young people. I congratulate you heartily."

"Wasn't that awfully decent of him!" Kerry exclaimed, as he glanced through the will.

"I knew he meant to do what was right!" Gail cried, over his shoulder.

"This," Doctor McEwan went on, "brings us to Dimity. We have still to account for that fragment of his coat sleeve which Decker found on the door of the vault.

If we are to understand Dimity's part in the affair, we must remember that he was abnormal and that his behavior might deviate sharply from that of a normal person at any time and without warning.

As soon as this becomes clear to us Dimity's conduct is understandable.

"Apparently, Dimity became obsessed by the idea that Colonel Conniston and his valuables were in danger, and that he was their protector. He was always 'listening and watching.' I gather that Colonel Conniston was more amused than angry with him. One cannot resent an old man's faithfulness.

"From what you tell me, Gail, he was listening at the door while you were talking with Colonel Conniston; and he was there while you were kneeling by Conniston's body the next morning; you, Mr. O'Neil, tumbled over him when you rushed out of the library. This delusion of Dimity's, in my opinion, explains the disappearance of the gems.

"Dimity, I venture to say, was at the door when Victor Gill got the combination of the vault. He must have seen him write it down and blot the figures. Here his abnormality crops up again.

"Instead of telling his master what he had seen, as he would have done

if his poor muddled brain had been clear, he later on read off the combination as you did, opened the vault, took out the intaglios, and hid them away.

"I can almost hear his chuckling at the disappointment of the thief when he should come. The gems hidden, and his master safe in his room, he relaxed his pathetic vigilance when it was really needed. Poor Dimity!

"When he found that his master had been killed, I imagine that he was too grief-stricken and terrified to tell what he knew. Or perhaps he wanted to work it out in his own queer way.

"This is pure theory, of course, but it seems to fit in with Dimity's mild insanity. If we find the gems, and they are where Dimity could have put them, I think my theory will be proven; if they are not where he could have put them, it will be disproven."

THERE was a sound at the door just then and they all looked up.

"Come in, Stark," McEwan called pleasantly. "I thought I heard you there."

For a moment there was silence; and then Stark's bulky figure filled the doorway. His heavy face was red with anger.

Kerry airily waved the will.

"Congratulations, old man! We are companions in good fortune, I see."

"Mr. Stark!" Gail exclaimed, before he could reply. "You offered ten thousand dollars reward for the recovery of the intaglios. Is the offer still good?"

"Since you know so much you ought to know where they are!" Stark said thickly.

"I imagine we shall find them, "McEwan responded evenly.

Gail stood up, laughing, her hand on O'Neil's shoulder.

"Come on, Kerry. I am sure Doctor McEwan and Mr. Stark have much to say to each other."

Kerry required no persuasion and Gail led him past the raging Stark. They went out into the patio, along the cliff path, and down the summer-house trail to the beach.

"Where to, Gail?" Kerry wanted to know.

Gail put her fingers on his lips, whereupon Kerry promptly kissed them.

"Wait and see."

Ten minutes later they stood in the shadow of Cathedral Rock.

It rested upon them like the shadow of a benign presence, and even the importunities of Kerry O'Neil were silenced. They stood in front of it for a moment; and then Gail led Kerry to the tiny steps that were like an approach to a pagan altar. They scrambled up and knelt by the font in which Gail had buried the urn two days before.

The abalone shell was still there and Gail began to scoop out the font. Kerry helped her, using his bare hands.

Gail was trembling with excitement and Kerry was on fire with curiosity; neither of them spoke until the abalone shell struck the urn and the top of the vessel was uncovered in its bed of sand.

"What's this?" Kerry whispered.

"Lift it out."

He did so.

"It isn't sealed; open it, Kerry! Open it; quickly!"

Kerry pried at the lid, got it off, and thrust his hand into the bronze vessel.

For a moment he kept it there, his dark eyes blazing incredulously into Gail's; then he slowly drew it out.

The Conniston intaglios were in his hand and they spilled through his

fingers like fire: green fire, liquid fire, the cold fire of starlight on frosty nights. Their beauty held him still and breathless as once it had held Victor Gill, who had followed it into the pit of madness and death.

"How did they get here?" he whispered.

Gail laughed unsteadily.

"I buried the wrong urn, Kerry. Doctor McEwan was right about Dimity. It came to me, in a flash, this morning."

She told him the story of Dimity and his two urns.

There was silence between them for a little while and they sat side by side on the sun-warmed rock. Then Kerry picked up the urn and they started up the beach, hand in hand.

Presently, they came within sight of the Casa de Ayer and they stopped and looked at it. The hot sun shone on the bright red tiles and it seemed to Gail that the shadow beneath which the house had stood this last week was there no longer.

Her hand tightened in Kerry's.

"If we could only live there always!" she whispered.

"We can," Kerry said, with a grin. "There'll be plenty of money. I am going to buy it for you."

When they started up the beach again the Casa de Ayer, house of yesterday, had become the Casa de Manana, *their* house of tomorrow.

THE END.

[*This novel will be published in book form at an early date by William Morrow and Company, New York*]

A Hempen Hobby

Most of us have hobbies or have some form of the collecting bug, but none so odd as that of an Englishman.

He was the usual type of athletic, sporting country gentleman who, out of curiosity, witnessed a hanging in Newgate. He dined with the sheriff after the execution and could talk of nothing but what he had seen, and as a souvenir asked if he might have the rope used in the hanging. He was presented with the ill-omened cord. This was the start of a strange collection.

He set about acquiring all the death ropes he could, until he had a large number of them, labeled and carefully put away in a cabinet.

About two years after he became interested in this sinister hobby, it was observed by his friends that he could talk of nothing but the executions he had witnessed and the behavior of the criminals on the scaffold.

He brought out his ropes, and exhibited them to his guests, with long harangues on the merits or demerits of the victims, that soon his society became unbearable; and he was left to himself.

The thing took such a hold on his mind, that no great surprise was manifested by his former friends, when the collector was one day found to have put an end to his life by hanging, using for that purpose one of the ropes of his collection.

He Sticks Up For Himself

By BARSINE DENT

DANNY lived in the wicked part of New York. He earned $1200 a year, which is bum pay—but he could see the approach of a policeman without having cold feelings at the base of his spine.

He had watched the technique of all species of crooks, from the hesitating Dip to the lead-spilling bill-collector who makes his living at the trigger end of a gat.

He knew all about the sale of fusel oil labeled Bourbon, and how underpaid cops replenish the depleted bankroll.

Yet he would not join in the life of crime that flourished about him. He was perfectly pleasant about it; and friendly. But he had no desire to pursue the career that was punctuated with gunshots and terminated in an abrupt and shocking way in the room with the green door.

The crooks looked up to him a little. And they always paid what he loaned them.

Far different was Luspecious Garetta, the Baywindow Man. He was poundage and power. He was a corporation to procure bail. He arranged with restaurants to penetrate the padlock; he owned trucks and cars with changeable licenses. He was very rich, and he was not a right guy.

Garetta came to Danny's room and was quite affable.

"You know how it is, Danny. Plenty of assets, but no cash. Can you slip me two hundred and five?"

Now, Danny was not entirely satisfied with the squareness of Garetta. He didn't like his looks exactly. Also, the trifling amount mentioned was nearly all the money he had.

"Give me your note."

Luspecious opened his wide, powerful mouth to roar down any person who doubted his financial stability, or would not compare his blandishing promises with the gospel itself. A man who lent money to hirelings and hesitated about him—— But he vaguely realized that Danny could not be bulldozed; there was no sense antagonizing him.

"Certainly," he assented, quite as if he had intended to do so all the time.

A note for two hundred and five, payable with interest in six months. The interest was his own idea. He might as well do the thing thoroughly.

"Of course, this is a mere formality. I can slip you the change much sooner."

THE time was almost up when Danny collided with a sneaky looking individual who was descending from his room. The Dip whisked past before he could detain him; with a sick tremor of foreboding he searched his

belongings. The note, of course, was gone.

The next day he went to Garetta.

"I need the two hundred and five."

"I don't owe you any money," said the Baywindow Man with great blandness. "Maybe 'Delete' Jackson would give you some; he skipped the bail."

"You owed me——"

"You haven't got any note," said Garetta, leering affectionately. "Get out before I throw you out!"

Danny knew he had as much chance collecting that debt as France to corner the indemnity. Garetta had not played square. Very well, he would fight back.

He got a pistol from one of his friends.

Garetta was going somewhere to make arrangements for a sale of rye (in pop bottles). He did not drive directly to the rendezvous, for obvious reasons. As he walked around a corner, a nasty voice rasped out:

"Point to heaven, big boze, or I'll puncture your inner tube!"

The suggestion was reinforced by a mean finger on the trigger.

The marauder removed the gleaming watch, the bulging bankroll and the "ice," and making an ironic bow departed.

"Carry my compliments to the cop!"

Garetta, the boss of crookdom proceeded to his engagement; but there were girations in his knees and he was very much astonished.

NOT so long afterward, two unpleasant detectives, financed by Garetta, tried to rope the estimable Danny, whom suspicion suggested might have some connection with the unforeseen bandit. They assured him that they were right guys, and tried to prove it by a long list of their crimes, but Danny trusted them like rattlesnakes.

They hoped that their example would make confession leak from Dan.

They said: "You have it on us. If we was to scrap, you could make it nasty."

"I've swallowed my tongue, s'far's what you've said tonight, boys."

"Don't you trust us? Didn't you ever shoot nobody you could tell about to make it even?"

"I parted a man's hair once, in Chicago," Danny answered easily.

In the days that followed the roping continued. The two boasted profusely of their exploits in hope of hearing an answering sneer. Surely a man that had the nerve to stick up Garetta would talk about it!

At last Dan himself brought things to a head.

"I'm sick of you guys talking like I'm a weak sister. I'm going to wreck some people tonight, sudden and profitable, and I want you should come along."

"Sure, that's the stuff, old boy. Meetcha in the old shack up the trail from the taxi farm?"

"Eleven thirty will be time enough."

"Shake on it."

Ha-ha; at last they had trapped him.

IN a suburb of the city not at all stylish, where the curving road went past admirable ambushes, and junk yards were prevalent, up a steep path from where certain elusive taxis had their garages, was the shack.

For Danny to fulfill this engagement was to prove true beyond contradiction his assertion that his business that night was blood-thirsty and unlawful.

They would then arrest him, and the third degree would do the rest to satisfy Garetta. Of course also he must then reveal where the loot was. They had searched his room in vain,

and also inquired of neighboring "fences."

With sawed-off shotguns, badges and handcuffs, they awaited the dear innocent. Half-past eleven came and went; still no Danny. Could it be that he had talked them into this engagement in order to flee the coop elsewhere? That he had s e e n through them all the time? Ah no, quite impossible. They were convinced that he would enter the trap.

The night was cold and sleety. The shack had a stove in it, it is true, but nothing to burn in the stove. Generations of thieves had convened in the shack at different times; none of them had ever risked, for the sake of warmth, the danger of light through cracks in the walls.

The present conspirators didn't even think of it; though their knees shook a little as they crouched there in the darkness, and the wind whistled through the broken glass of the side window. The shack was a cage for coldness.

Why the devil didn't he come? It got on their nerves. They faced the door, which was ajar, and wished the wind would not rattle the branches; they wished to hear the approach of anyone.

Suddenly a gritty voice startled them; behind them a chunky gat was thrust through a big knothole.

"Put em up, friends!"

Their intestines were ice. They obeyed.

"Pay attention. Get these orders wrong and I make holes in your innards. Throw all the shooting irons —yes, gats too—out the side window. Ready—GO."

He reached the guns first when they ran to recover them.

"Step back in the house, pals,—farther, yes, altogether in the corner."

The gun pointed ominously. They remembered he said he was going to kill somebody that night. Ugh!

"Cold in here," he suggested.

With his left hand he gracefully lifted the rusty lid from the stove, and withdrew a package from the interior, which he parked in the pocket of his coat.

The loot he stole from Garetta!

"Now," he said poisonously, *"take off your clothes."*

Their fingers shook as they obeyed.

"Tie them in a bundle."

"I am going to get a breath of air," he said gleefully. "Come out before daybreak and you may interrupt a bullet. Goodnight."

He went out, into profound darkness and the noise of the wind.

They shivered with cold and shock.

In the morning they saw their clothes, soaking wet, but within fifteen feet of the door. The guns leaned against the side of the shack.

Where was Dan?

He had taken the loot that night to a reliable fence, who snorted,

"How come a gimme-artist in his right mind would get fooled by a lot of dime store glass? That watch is practically tin. I would cheat myself if you get a quarter for the whole collection."

Without a word Dan left the pseudo-jewelry on the counter and walked out.

He took the train for Des Moines. He counted the bankroll and adjacent change. Two hundred and three dollars and sixteen cents.

A dollar eighty-four short, and he was leaving a good job behind him.

He decided again that a life of crime does not pay.

The Rusty Key

By CLAUDIA WADDELL ROBERTS

THE massive door swung back on its rusted hinges, jarring the old silver knocker into a faint sound as if touched by a spirit hand, and John Moore, recluse of twenty years, came out again into the lime-light. But it was feet foremost, then to go down forever under four feet of earth and a marble slab.

As night had closed down on him, the shadows of night revealed by intermittent flashes of lightning and the last struggling rays of a winter's sun were creeping stealthily, like things of evil, to close down on the old house from which he had gone.

Charlie Moore, who came into immediate possession of his uncle's property, quickened his step. As he, too, was moving toward "the ghostly spot," as the town called it—the queer old octagon-shaped house with its high, sharp cupola, its iron-barred basement, its "dark room," its mysteries, its ghostly legends, and the forbidden gate sentineled on the right by the bullet-scarred post.

As he turned a sharp corner and the house came into view, he was gripped by a sudden determination. He threw up his head and squared his shoulders, adding several inches, as it were, to his medium stature; his ruddy complexion took on a darker hue. He would show 'em, and show 'em now!

He would live in this house; he would redeem the reputation of it; he would refute all those absurd, foolish tales of ghosts that were depreciating the value of the property. His best friend pitied him; his worst enemy was satisfied! And they would come, he knew it, with these emotions strongly indicated on their faces. Even now they were coming. They were close behind him.

As he caught the sound of their footsteps, his mood changed—a smile of understanding, of fellow-feeling gave place to the frown.

He, too, had a morbid curiosity to enter the place where for so long he had been shut out; to poke around in dark, mysterious corners; to see—yes, to see the bullet, imbedded in the post, that had passed through the heart of a man. Let them come. He would give them welcome.

And they came, under pretext of paying their respects to him but, really devoured by all those desires, morbid though they might be, that possessed Charlie. And he gave them free access; he hurried them along before the storm should break, before night should overtake them.

He went with them to the gate; to the post, and aided in probing for the bullet that his uncle, John Moore, had fired on that never-to-be-forgotten night.

He was glad when they struck it. He wanted to get rid of it. It would clear his property of one evil, at least.

They dug it out. They rolled it in their fingers as a rare gem, and searched and pried into it with as much interest as if they really expected to find some little spark that would solve the mystery of years and

bring to a climax the unfinished story.

But the last spark in the bullet had gone out. It had played the part for which fate had molded it, and had dropped from off the stage a harmless piece of lead.

Not so the post. The operation had left it a more sinister object than ever—a mysterious thing with wounds gaping wide open yet hugging the secret close.

At evening, the last rays of the sun would focus here magnifying and distorting every blemish; the lightning, playing for so many years on the outside, would strike in with keen abandon, as it was now doing, and leave the impression of blood oozing, oozing, but never dropping, from its shattered heart.

A LOW rumble of thunder came. The crowd dispersed. The few from the old days who had known the actors in the drama lingered, some force impelling them to stop; to relive the story that today's events had thrown sharply across the screen of memory.

"That story is like this veranda," said Jimmie Clarke, stretching his long length out in the most comfortable chair in reach and knocking the ashes from his cigar. "It goes on in a complete circle without an end; it is like 'the dark room,' full of mysteries which no light can penetrate.

"All we know are the bare facts in the case: The coming of Eugene Barry and his murder; the trial and acquittal of John Moore and his withdrawal from the world; the disappearance of Helen Moore, his wife, on the night of the murder and the fruitless efforts of twenty years which have been made to locate her."

"We know—we that were here at the time know," the sharp voice of old Mr. Norton took up the tale, "that she was young, and beautiful, and good—yes, sir, good!" he repeated, with a sounding whack on the arm of his chair and a challenging glance all around.

He sat bolt upright, though thirty years older than Jimmie, and his keen old eyes under their shaggy brows took note of every movement and expression of the men as the story unfolded, ready, at the slightest criticism of Helen, to hurl forth shot and shell into the ranks of the enemy.

"We know," he continued, "my wife and I know that if there ever was a sinless creature it was Helen Moore. She lived next-door to us when she came here a bride, and during all the happy days before that villain came. We loved her and she loved us, and she worshiped her husband, and he was worthy of her love.

"To subject his wife to criticism was a crime in John Moore's eyes, but he was a just man and never struck without warning; so, he warned Barry, and this warning being ignored, he killed him. He should have killed him—we know it—we that knew her best, know it!"

The old man's voice trailed off into the fast coming night and was lost in the growling thunder while his listeners sat pondering the old, unanswered question: What was the secret of the murdered man's power over Helen Moore; why and how had she vanished; where had she gone, and what had been her history since?

If Moore knew, he had kept it from the world, as he had kept himself, from that fatal night, and only the memory of her stealing over the town like the fragrance of early spring flowers, and the bullet-scarred post, bore witness that she had been.

This last tangible proof kept her ever in mind, and the post became a landmark which was known far and wide. No stranger ever came to Bar-

bour without seeing it, or left without hearing the story which neither the children who had grown up nor the men who were growing down could finish.

"Few of us doubted her innocence, Mr. Norton," Jimmie's voice stole into the stillness. "It was just a thing we could not understand and never will, I reckon.

"I remember," he continued after a pause, "the night that Barry first appeared among us. We were at a dance at the old Hill Hotel that was burned years ago and that stood where the Fryer House now stands.

"Helen and I were dancing together, and as the waltz came to an end and we stopped, facing the door, Barry with several others came in from the train. I heard her gasp, and turning saw a marvelous transformation. All the brightness of a moment before was gone. There was a startled look of fear, almost terror, in her eyes, and yet she started forward as if compelled against her will to meet this stranger who hurried eagerly forward at the sight of her.

In a moment she recovered sufficiently to remember the proprieties and introduce me to, 'Mr. Barry, an old friend of her girlhood,' she said; then Barry, laughing teasingly, and, it struck me then and ever after, with some vague touch of cruel pleasure in his laugh, asked 'to meet her husband.' So she took him away and that was the last time I ever saw the poor girl as she had been."

DID Jimmie sigh, or was it only the whisper of the coming storm in the dead branches of the trees? The men looked at him curiously whom they have known intimately all the forty-four years of his life, the upright, honorable, beloved Jimmie.

Do they know him after all? Is there a secret in his life, too? And the story—might the story have been different if Barry had not come? But Barry came, and——

"From the night of his coming," Jimmie continued, "bright, beautiful Helen Moore, who had grown to be the life of every gathering in the short time she had been in Barbour, retired from all social life. She was seen no more except on rare occasions, and then this man had her in tow.

"He visited her at home in season and out until people began to talk. Then Moore spoke to him and when he disregarded the warning, shot him as he was entering his gate.

"The night was as bright as day and everybody saw Barry as he turned the corner and swung into what he had sneeringly called 'Danger Street.' He came with a cock-sure, dare-devil air, stepping jauntingly, lightly, as one who has no cares. His straw hat was tilted exactly at the right angle to display his heavy waves of black hair and to mark him as a man of alluring rakishness.

"He was whistling a right merry little tune, whistling to keep up his courage, or as proof that he cared just that and no more for the warning he had received.

"Moore, sitting alone in the moonlight, saw him coming, as we did; but, unlike us, he was not speculating as to what would happen if he should open the forbidden gate. He knew, and knowing was filled with sick suspense; for, as Mr. Norton has said, he valued life highly and had a horror of doing the thing he might be called upon to do.

"He had tried to avoid it. But when he found he could not, when Barry lifted the latch and started in, he raised his pistol without a moment's hesitation and fired.

"Moore was the crack shot of Barbour, and when the examination was made it was found that the bullet had entered directly through the heart

and ploughed its way with such force that it had passed through the body and buried itself in the right-hand post of the gate.

"The killing occurred just on the eve of the spring term of circuit court, so the trial came off with no nerve-wracking delay. The jury handed in a verdict for acquittal almost before the echoes of the closing speech had died away, and Moore walked out a free man into a barren world and a desolate home. The smoke from his pistol had vanished, and so also had Helen, his wife.

"As I have said, few of us doubted her innocence. It was just a thing we could not understand. We knew her to be bright, vivacious, and charming, but, that was all. Mr. Norton is right. She loved her husband and was as true to him as steel.

"Yes, loved John Moore with whom we had gone to school and surpassed every time in the multiplication table; John Moore, whom we had knocked down in many a boyish fight, and whose old, ugly, freckled mug we had smashed beyond recognition more times than one.

"That is one thing a man can never understand about a woman—how she can defy a man who to him is common clay!"

"Moore *was* an ugly boy," broke in old Mr. Norton, "but he grew up into quite a good looking man, though you boys would never believe it; the prospective was too short. You saw him always as you had seen him at school—a chubby, freckled face boy, with red hair and no nose to speak of."

"But we conceded his teeth were good," chimed in Jimmie.

"And that he gained height with the years," supplied another.

"But because women didn't dote on him, as they do on Jimmie— young women, old women, middle-aged women—" went on Mr. Norton, "you can't understand how one or two women loved him, and how his wife adored him."

"No," Jimmie smiled whimsically, "I still stick to it. 'Women are strange creatures'—we told ourselves so repeatedly as we stood before our mirrors thinking of all these things and comparing our attractive features and manly beauty with his!"

Jimmie laughed as a boy laughs, but the laugh ended in a little sigh —ah, my bachelor friend—the laugh ended in a little sigh for a memory which still held its sweetness.

"I wont deny," he spoke as a mind reader, "that we all loved her, just as Mr. and Mrs. Norton did. Who could help it?"

He paused for a moment and watched the smoke as it curled off from his cigar and faded into the shadows, even as the girl had faded.

"I think we would have died for her," he breathed s o f t l y, "and then—"

"And then," interrupted Eli Smith with a vicious bark, "this man came and proved that all your theories were so much hot air!"

MR. NORTON gripped the arms of his chair and, leaning over would very probably have annihilated the speaker if there had not come upon their startled ears the report as of a pistol from within the house. A door had slammed with sudden and peculiar violence.

"Did you hear that?" cried some one. "By George, the tales they tell are true; the sound is exactly like the report of a pistol!

"The doors in this house, they say, can never be securely bolted, but have a way of suddenly clicking and gliding open, or of crashing to, as we have just heard, as if thrown by some hidden force. Charlie, old boy, you are welcome to your inheritance!"

"The bolts are weakened by age,"

Jimmie volunteered, as he caught sight of Charlie's face, "and it must be hard to keep them latched, under the most favorable condition. When to this is added a breeze, be it ever so light, slipping in, not straight and above board as in the ordinary building, but in a circle through this round house, on the same principle as a whirlwind; latches click and doors swing open seemingly in the most mysterious manner, when in truth, it is just as the current happens to strike them."

But the tales went on of how the murdered man's spirit wandered here searching, ever searching, for the tiny spark which had been his life; and of how always and forever the soft rustle of a woman's skirts could be heard about the place.

Then, night coming on and a cold rain striking with the promise of sleet against the windows, Charlie's guests arose to leave him to the enjoyment of "the dreary spot." But he put out his hand in protest.

"I do not agree with your verdict of this place. Your tales have not frightened me, but a storm is coming up—you hear it—and when it comes I don't want to be here by myself.

"What better time than now to get on the trail of that bullet and trail it to the end—in other words, make a night of it, if it takes the night? We'll phone your people as to your whereabouts, eat our supper and get to work. What say you?"

What they said was hardly a matter of choice, for there came a rush of wind and rain that beat them in. Not Charlie, the host, but the first man to reach it, tugged at the door—the rusted lock—to get it open, and several of them pushed bodily against it to get it shut again.

And once more, there came the faint tap of the silver knocker to the startled men; a spirit had touched it and, denied admittance, went moaning and shrieking around the eaves until the stoutest heart among them quailed at the ghostly manifestations.

When Charlie came to himself a full second had passed. The house was in darkness and the long delayed winter was close at hand. Quickly he turned on a blaze of light; fires were kindled, and soon the guests were enfolded in the aroma of steaming coffee.

But the storm raged on! It struck the windows with icy fingers; it hammered on the tin roof; and its voice held all other voices in abeyance as the men partook of the hastily prepared meal.

When the last plate was pushed back, Charlie arose and, taking out a silver coin, said, "We'll begin as falls this piece of money—heads up, we start with my uncle's private desk; tails up, we go below into that dark room in the basement."

"Never," cried Mr. Norton, "never must such a portentous undertaking be left to chance. Call for a vote on it!"

BEFORE they could comply, Jerry, the butler, who was as much a fixture of the place as the old mahogany sideboard or the wine-cellar, threw up his hand in great agitation and begged to be allowed to speak.

Almost like a spirit of the storm he stood there, erect as a soldier in spite of his sixty-odd years, with hand uplifted; or was it as the guardian of the family, ready to intervene; to spring forward at the approach of an interloper?

The men looked at him inquisitively. His voluntary retirement, his twenty years close association, with John Moore had done much for Jerry. The diamond in the rough had returned to the world considerably polished.

"Gen'l'men, suh," he began, in an apologetic manner, "Mr. Moore—Mr.

John—tole me to ask you to let that myst'ry be. 'What good will it do,' he moaned time and again toward the last, 'what good will it do after all these years?' "

"What *good* will it do?" cried Charlie. "It will enable me to make a happy home out of the wreck of the old, and I'm going to unravel it. Do you hear me, Jerry. I'm going to unravel it, and before you know it, I'll be married and my children's voices will be filling every nook and corner of this tragic, old eight-sided house!"

"Then, suh, if you will have it so," stammered Jerry, as if the confession was being dragged from him, "he tole me to give you this"—holding out a huge, rusty key—"and to take you to the dark room after I tole you what he said.

"He wanted you to know that durin' all the years we've been shut up here together, I've been the same faithful friend and servant you all knew me to be before this trouble come. Yes, suh, that's what he said, suh—'friend.' I've got to tell you this, to let you know I'm honest and speakin' the truth, when I tell you what I have to tell you.

"When that pistol fired and I was hurryin' quite briefly to the front to see what was up, I met Miss Helen runnin' up the back stairs and cryin' as she run, 'Oh my God, it has come at last!'

"When she saw me, she stopped, and, wringin' her hands, cried, 'He has killed him; do you hear me; he has killed him, and it's the best shot that was ever fired! Tell him so; tell my husband so; and that I said it, and that I am glad he is dead—glad—glad—glad! But oh,' she wailed out sudden like, just like she ain't paid no mind to it before, 'but oh, the sin of it and the curse on me!'

"Then she run like she's pretty nigh crazy up the stairs. She *was* crazy, I knew it, to speak to me, a servant, like that. She went on up the stairs and out of sight and that was the last time I ever saw her till—till—"

"Until when," they exclaimed, as if in one breath, "speak up and don't keep us waiting."

"Gimme time, suh, gimme time. I'm doin' the best I can"—the butler wiped the perspiration from his face—"I must tell you all and tell it just as it happened."

"Let him sit down," commanded old Mr. Norton, "let him sit down."

"When she went out of sight," continued Jerry, taking the chair indicated, "I hurried on to the front and saw the dead man layin' out in the moonlight at our gate with a crowd migratin' round him same as a passel of turkey buzzards.

"When Mr. John saw me he called me to him, give me the pistol and tole me to put it in his desk, and to kill any four-legged or two-legged beast I found prowlin' around. No, suh, he ain't sorry; but to the end, took saterfaction in that killin'.

"I tole him what Miss Helen say, and soon's the trial's over, he give me orders to pack. 'I'm going for my wife,' he say. We went back to her home—the home where he courted and married her; but she ain't there. We hunt everywhere, but she ain't nowhere. She's gone and her tracks is hid like a rabbit's in the falling snow.

"In the spring of the next year, twelve months after the killin', we come home, and here we stay, 'tendin' to our own business, for twelve long years."

"Twenty long years," corrected Mr. Norton.

"Yessuh, I know in all it's been twenty years; but what I mean to say, is, we staid here twelve years before we hear anything about her again."

"What! You heard from her?"

Several men bent forward and asked the question in one breath of astonishment.

"Yessuh, it happen this way: You all know about the dark room, how it was built as a hidin' place from the Indians in Indian times. It's built of solid stone down under the earth. The air gets in by little pipes, and no light gets in at all, 'cept when we light the candles that we always keep there.

"It ain't been open in I don't know how long, when one night Mr. John decided he couldn't stand the sight of her desk no more—her desk that always stood in her room. So he tole me to get the key and take it down to the dark room and that he'd go ahead of me and light the way with a lantern, which he done. We got to the basement, opened the door, and ——"

The butler, wiping the sweat from his brow, turned to his audience a face which revealed memories of some terrifying nature. He seemed unable to go on; he was unable to go on in a straight-forward path so we went back a pace for another start.

"That was eight years ago, suh," he said, looking straight at Charlie, his new employer, as if in appeal, for no matter what came, "and I remember it like it happen this very minute. It was eight years ago on just such a night as this when we went down to the dark room and found—and found Miss Helen a-layin' there on the floor."

The men gasped, and old Mr. Norton cut the air with sharp, jagged tones:

"I wouldn't believe you on your oath," he cried, "and I'm going to see to it that you are hung. Do you hear me; I'm going to see to it that you are hung!"

"But we did, suh, we sho done that very thing," replied the butler with trembling assurance, "and I'm goin' prove it to you 'fore I stop. I ain't askin' you to take my word for it. We went down there, unlocked the door——"

"Unlocked it; do you hear that, boys? They unlocked the door and found the body! Now, what I want to know is, who locked her in there?"

"Mr. Charlie," the butler in his stress drew nearer to Charlie and thus sealed the bond forever between them, "Mr. Charlie, please ask the gen'l'men to gimme time. I'm doin' the best I can. I'm goin' to tell 'em everything if they'll only gimme time."

THUS appealed to, the men settled back, watching every movement of the butler and listening with strained interest to his every word.

"As I was goin' on to say," he resumed, "Mr. John unlocked the door and I stepped in with the desk, him holdin' the lantern so as I could see. As I stepped in, I stumbled and come pretty nigh fallin', and when I balanced myself and looked down, 'fore God, I thought I'd die in my tracks! Layin' at my feet was Miss Helen!

"Her eyes were wide open and she was starin' up at me scared like, just as she was when she went up the back stairs—and then, she was gone! I don't know how it was; it 'pears like a dream to me. But one minute there she was, and the next minute there she warn't, only just sum'un that use to be Miss Helen a layin' there on the floor.

"I dropped the desk and called to Mr. John in a voice I ain't never heard before and pointed down. He ain't say nothin' only just mumblin' sum'un to himself. He just stood there starin' like a crazy man at that thing on the floor.

"When the darkness left, or we just ingen'ly got use to it, we see sum'un else—It was a piece of yellow paper with a weight holdin' it down."

"A letter," cried the men.

"Yessuh, it was a letter. It ain't have no date nor beginnin'; it just start off tellin' him everything. She tell him how she come in the dark room to die; that she plan all along to come if the thing happen what had happen.

"She got the key, she say, from the nail where it always hung and unlock the door, then prop it open while she run back to put the key in place so as to 'allay all suspicion' —her exact words, suh—'to allay all suspicion.'

"You see," the butler explained, "there's a spring lock on that door and when it springs to, it can't be unlocked without the key; she fix it that way, she say, 'gainst her courage failin' her in the last minute.

"She went in and let the door spring back and lock her in her tomb. She tell how she plan to kill herself —'such an easy death,' she say. She asked him if he remember what a 'glorious effect' morphine had on her?

"She say she's got ten times as much as the doctor ever give her in the worse pain, and when she finish the letter she's goin' to take it and float away, she say—'float away without pain or struggle.'"

Jerry paused, and then they watched with pounding hearts the veil thus rising on the mystery of twenty years.

"That was bad enough on poor Mr. John, but the thing that come after was what run him pretty nigh crazy when he found it out. 'I might have known,' he said, 'that my wife would have stayed in her own home under her husband's protection. And I could have saved her if I hadn't run off like a fool on a fool's errand.'

"After Mr. John say he's a fool, I know better'n to say he ain't, and I sho know better'n to say he is, so I ain't say nothin'. Mr. John ain't talkin' to me, nohow, he just talkin' to get rid of his troubles.

"And that thing she told him, suh, is how come she wanders here, passin' up and down the stairs with a soft, quick step, closin' and openin' the doors all the time."

"You believe this, do you?" Jimmie asked the question hopefully, almost joyfully, for with the admission would return the old Jerry true to type, who could never be educated above the alluring superstition of his race—who would always believe in "ghosts."

"'Fore God, I do, Mr. Jimmie. When the doors click and swing open, Miss Helen is sho movin' around."

"But what brings her back; what could she possibly want here, Jerry?" Jimmie asked the question softly, almost reverently.

"She is searchin' for it, Mr. Jimmie; she is searchin' for it yet."

"Searching for what?" cried old Mr. Norton. "Speak out and tell us what you mean?"

Jerry stood up.

"I'm ready to go with you now," he said, "for this is all Mr. John tole me to tell you before I took you down."

"Why can't you finish the tale for us without going down into that godforsaken hole?" urged Charlie. "I'm sure that I, for one, prefer the warmth and brightness of this room, with the bottles in easy reach, to such a pilgrimage on such a beastly night as this!"

ALL agreeing, they besought the butler to continue; but he said he could not go against "Mr. John's dying orders." And so it was, they were forced to submit if they would pursue the trail, and follow behind Jerry who led the way, carrying the lantern and the key.

As they groped down the crooked stair leading into the dark abyss, a

door slammed above with a finality which seemed to cut off forever communication with the world of light, and something passed with an electrical effect, swiftly, lightly.

Jimmie called back in a high pitched, unnatural voice, "to look out for rats—that the place seemed infested with them."

They laughed, and the ill-timed merriment struck the air with discordant sound carrying here, there and everywhere until it ended in vanishing echoes at the door of the dark room.

As the rusty lock turned, there was a rasping, grating sound that struck the nerves like jagged steel; and, as the door swung slowly open, a rush of stagnant air that sent them reeling back like drunken men.

They were for giving it up then and there and had halfway turned to retrace their steps when old Mr. Norton popped up. He said he knew that woman was innocent and, if there was any way to prove it, he was going to see it done.

"If he was in the midst of a set of weak-kneed quitters, then he and Jerry would go in alone."

Thus goaded, they entered—Jimmie Clarke first procuring the key and pocketing it against all accidents.

They entered and peered through the gloom revealed by the lantern's dim, uncertain light, until the butler, setting it down, proceeded to light the candles stuck in brackets along the walls. These candles, after great sputtering and muttering finally settled down into a soft, faint light.

Along the walls rude chairs were placed, and in one corner was a table holding a pitcher, bowl and glass.

They saw this at a glance in the uncanny light, and then their vision focussed on an object in the middle of the room.

They had entered a vault, a veritable vault and were in the midst of the dead. A grave was there built up rudely in the old way with the dirt coming up like a child's frog-house. Shocked beyond words, a new terror gripped them as Jerry called out, wildly:

"There—there she is—don't you see her? She's standing on top of the grave; on the sharp ridge. She's scared like—like she was the other times—and she's holdin' out her hands to you — now — now she's gone!"

And there was nothing left for any of them but the rude grave coming up like a gigantic frog-house, undulating in the shadows as if in mocking laughter at their fears.

They sank down in the nearest chairs and looked at each other for confirmation or denial of the truth of Jerry's vision; only Jimmie struggled to his feet and, to convince himself that Helen could not have appeared, opened an argument against it.

"You know, Jerry, of course you know, there are no such things as ghosts—the very idea of such a thing. When we entered this room every man of us had in mind that woman as she left us in her youth. We almost saw her even in the dark. Then the candles were lighted and the uncertain rays focussed on a pile of dust that arose as we came in.

"This dust assumed the shape and features of the picture we had in mind. We knew it to be the dust, but you took it for the woman.

"In another moment, the fresh air rushed in through the open door and lo, the woman—and the dust—were gone. Just an optical delusion, Jerry, that is all. Don't be an idiot!"

Jimmy mopped his face and sat down.

JERRY stood with his back against the wall, staring wide-eyed as if into space peopled with beings of whom his race had caught sight long before these beings could, if ever, be revealed to the white man.

That "Mr. Jimmie" tries to explain these visions by the rule of natural causes, he scorns; not by word of mouth, but, by a grim silence—as he stands tall and superior in their midst—that expresses it more emphatically.

Old Mr. Norton's voice cut the tense atmosphere, ignoring Jimmie and every other obstacle in the path of the main issue.

"And so," he cried, straightening up and facing the butler, "and so this is why you had to tell us about your fine character and honesty before you would let us in!

"John Moore murdered this woman and you were an accomplice! Nothing you can say will clear you, and I shall see to it that you are hung as high as I wish we had hung him, the double murderer—fools that we were to set him free!"

The men looked on in dumb surprise. Things were happening too fast for them to grasp, and they watched in a dazed way every movement of Mr. Norton and the butler as if they were actors in some stage play which would soon come to an end with the grave opening in the last act and the woman coming out to confirm or deny the butler's statements.

"But what I told you was the truth, Mr. Norton," Jerry began pleading his cause. "After Miss Helen went up the back stairs I never saw her again in twelve years."

"What has that to do with it—whether you two murdered her on the night the man was shot, or twelve years later when you say you saw her again? What difference does it make as far as the crime is concerned when you did it, just so it was done? Answer me that, and tell me how you expect to escape the gallows?"

"I'll prove it, suh, I'll prove it by showin' you Miss Helen's letter. It's in a box at the head of the grave."

Aroused to the reality of the play by this plain statement of facts, the men sprang to their feet and rescued the box; and Jimmie Clarke, with whom she had been dancing that night when black fate came in at the door, took her letter to a flickering light. Standing there in the semi-shadows like a dream figure with a message from a dream world, he brought them farther and farther along the trail they were trailing. He began, as she had begun, abruptly and to the point:

"There never was a better shot fired," she had written, "than the shot you fired tonight! There never was such a rascal in the form of man as the man you killed tonight! I know—none better — because — because—oh, I can't tell you, and yet I must!

"For five years before this man appeared in our midst, he had been dead to me and to the world. He was in a train wreck five years ago and was instantly killed.

"That was the news published and sent to me—to me, because I was the most interested person in the world in this news. And the fact that he was dead had the same effect upon me as a draught of some wonderful elixir.

"I felt like laughing and dancing every moment of the day. I felt this way before I met you, and after that—well, I loved you. You were so good to me, you were so different from him, and we were so happy in our beautiful home and in the midst of so many friends who had taken me to their hearts for your dear sake.

"In the midst of all this happiness he appeared, and I found as the days passed that his character was blacker even than I had known. He was on that wrecked train but escaped, and when some unknown body, crushed and torn beyond recognition, was picked up, they found a card bearing the name of Eugene Barry, dropped there purposely by him, he laughingly told me, to bring about just the result it did.

"He it was who had the paper sent to me; he plotted to get me into just such a scrape.

"He watched my career; let me go on and marry you from pure devilment—revenge, he called it, for the death of my love for him. How could I love him when he was so cruel to me, and timed his coming in the very height of my happiness?

"There never was such a rascal in the form of man; there never was a better shot fired than the shot you fired tonight. And yet, I wanted to prevent it; therefore, I did not throw myself on your mercy and acknowledge everything as soon as he arrived. I knew you would kill him.

"I planned, if he should ever go, to tell you all. I saw your misery, your ebbing patience, and I warned him what would happen, but he laughed at me. Then, you shot him and I feared it was now too late to act. My confession might complicate matters for you, and you must be cleared at any cost.

"To disappear will be a tacit acknowledgment of guilt on my part and a justifiable reason for your deed. What difference does it make to me, who am innocent in the sight of God, what the world thinks of me? But—but tell Jimmie, let Jimmie know."

Jimmie's tongue faltered, his voice grew husky. He had waited since he was a boy, a boy of twenty-four, for some word—any word from her. Now when it came suddenly, unexpectedly, it was almost too much. But he must not let these men see.

He had guarded his secret well, even from her. He must still guard it, at any cost. With hardly a perceptible pause, he had himself in hand and read on:

"The thing that does concern me is, that you must be saved. I am willing to die for this. And here I am now in the dark room, ready to take the step and death is nothing to the anguish of remembering that I have never been your wife!"

Jimmie stopped reading here and looked up.

"Do you catch that, boys? Never—been—his—wife!"

"She means," cried old Mr. Norton, zealously guarding her name at every point, "never been his wife by the laws of man because she was already the wife of that rascal; but, in the sight of God—"

"And in the sight of man," broke in Jimmie, "she is innocent. We have known it always. We needed no proof; but, thank God, we have it at last for those who do.

"Let me see"—going back to the letter—"where was I? Why—why, a break occurs here. She discovers—she discovers——"

Jimmie's face blanched. He crushed the letter in his hand.

"Jerry," he called out sharply, turning suddenly upon the startled butler, "Jerry, what was she searching for? What *is* she searching for? Tell us, do you hear me? Tell us, I say!"

"Yes, Mr. Jimmie, yes, suh, that is what I was going on to say. We found it—me and Mr. John found it where she left it on a shelf outside the door. She forgot it, suh—she forgot the morphine that was goin' to kill her so easy like—and she is searching for it yet."

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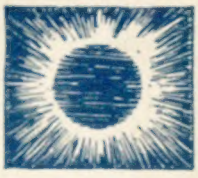

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My Fatal Mistake

That night at the hotel dance I learned a lesson. The first couple that caught my eye was Grace and Harry—but what a different Harry! His slick hair and dapper manner seemed to fit the picture perfectly. And how easily—how faultlessly he danced!

"Aren't you going to ask me to dance?" Grace called gaily to me.

I flushed, realizing I couldn't dance a step. "Why, I—I'd love to, but——"

"All right," Grace broke in, "the next dance is yours."

Before I could speak the orchestra started to play—a dreamy oriental tune. Grace stood waiting. I could feel Harry's smirking eyes on me. I made a wild stab. "I'm sorry—but I can't tango."

"That's a waltz!" Grace laughed.

"I don't waltz either," I faltered, realizing I had made a faux pas—a blunder.

"I don't think you want to dance with me at all," she flashed. Before I could explain further, she and Harry had glided away. I stumbled out of the ball room. Grace's last words—"I'll never speak to you again!" were ringing in my ears.

Why I Never Made Friends

That night I was mighty blue. Why couldn't I make a hit with the girls like the other fellows did? Girls liked me at first but later they went off with fellows who took them dancing. That was my weak point—I could never be popular unless I learned to dance. I had heard of a new way to learn—at home, without music or teacher. Arthur Murray, America's foremost dancing instructor, had perfected this method. I sent for his free booklet and test lesson.

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I continued learning so I could attend the coming mask ball at the hotel.

What an exciting night that was! I danced with many partners, keeping perfect time, gliding around the floor like a professional! Midnight found me dancing with a charming creature in a soft, clinging costume.

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She caught my hand. "Oh, I'm sorry——" Her voice broke—the voice that thrilled me so strangely. I brushed aside her mask. Imagine my wonder—surprise—joy! It was Grace who was smiling up at me!

What wonderful times we had together after that. We went everywhere—parties, balls and dances. No longer was I a gloomy wallflower, envying others. I was throbbing with new life, new popularity, acclaimed as a faultless dancer wherever I went. The day I wrote to Arthur Murray was certainly the luckiest in my life.

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